

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound

PLUS  
THE BEST  
FILMS OF  
2015



LEONARDO DICAPRIO IN ALEJANDRO GONZALEZ INARRITU'S

# THE REVENANT

PLUS

- TERENCE DAVIES ON 'SUNSET SONG' ● NORA EPHRON: THE ORIGINAL QUEEN OF ROMCOM
- GUY MADDIN'S 'THE FORBIDDEN ROOM' ● RAOUL PECK: HAITI'S ANGRY VOICE

£4.50



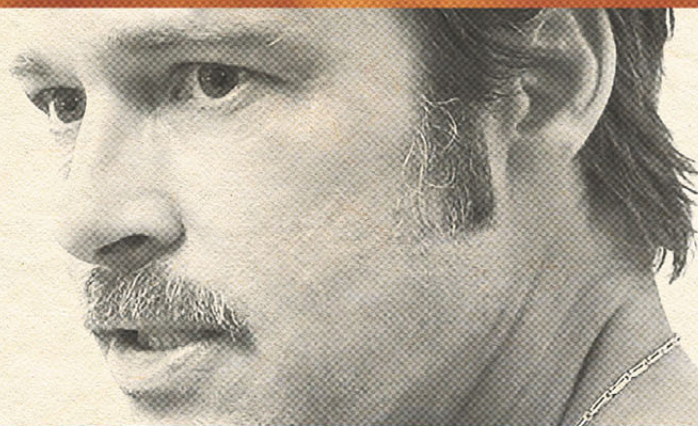




**BRAD PITT    ANGELINA JOLIE PITT**

# *By the Sea*

**Written and Directed by ANGELINA JOLIE PITT**



**In Cinemas December 11**

© 2015 UNIVERSAL STUDIOS  
 UNIVERSAL  
A UNIVERSAL COMPANY





40

## Queen of hearts

Nora Ephron made films that helped define the modern romcom, as well as forging a confessional intimacy that influenced a generation of female comics. By **Hannah McGill**

### REGULARS

5 **Editorial** In memoriam

#### Rushes

- 6 **In the frame:** Jez Stewart takes the pulse of the UK's animation industry
- 8 **Object Lesson:** Hannah McGill listens out for bells in the movies
- 9 **The Five Key:** films about sisters
- 11 **Online:** Simran Hans talks to Cecile Emeke about her singular body of work
- 13 **Dispatches:** Mark Cousins explores some intriguing parallels between Doctor Who and James Bond

#### The Industry

- 14 **Development Tale:** Charles Gant on the low-budget British drama *Radiator*
- 15 **The Numbers:** Charles Gant reports on the box-office success of *Brooklyn*
- 16 **Brewster:** Ben Roberts considers how to get younger viewers to be more adventurous in their cinema choices

#### Obituary

18 **Penelope Houston**

#### Wide Angle

- 60 **Profile:** Ashley Clark on the films of the Ethiopian-born, US-based Haile Gerima
- 62 **Soundings:** Sam Davies looks at the work of Haitian photographer and documentarian Leah Gordon
- 63 **Primal Screen:** Geoff Brown explores the early years of the talkies in Britain
- 64 **Artists Moving Image:** Neil Young celebrates Peter Tscherkassky's tiny, exquisitely crafted films
- 65 **Festival:** Giovanni Vimercati reports from DocLisboa

#### Letters

#### Endings

- 112 **Adam Batty** ponders the enigmatic final exchange in Godard's *Breathless*

### FEATURES

22

#### COVER FEATURE

##### Call of the wild

Alejandro González Iñárritu talks to **Edward Lawrenson** about how his decision to shoot his gripping true-tale revenge western *The Revenant*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hardy, in sub-zero conditions in the Canadian wilderness turned the film's production into a feat of Herzogian endurance

28

##### Treasures from the deep

A series of tales inspired by lost or abandoned films from cinema history are stitched into an elaborate mosaic in Guy Maddin and Evan Johnson's 'ectoplasmic splooge' of a movie *The Forbidden Room*. **Adam Nayman** talks to the film's directors

32

##### Love in a cold climate

**Nick James** talks to Terence Davies about his lush adaptation of the classic 1930s novel *Sunset Song*, which tells the story of a farming family's hardscrabble existence in Scotland in the years leading up to World War I

36

##### Fight the power

In a series of taut dramas and combative documentaries the Haitian director Raoul Peck has taken aim at everything from the class system and the iniquities of capitalism to the brutal injustices of history and the bureaucratic failures of international aid. By **Ashley Clark**

46

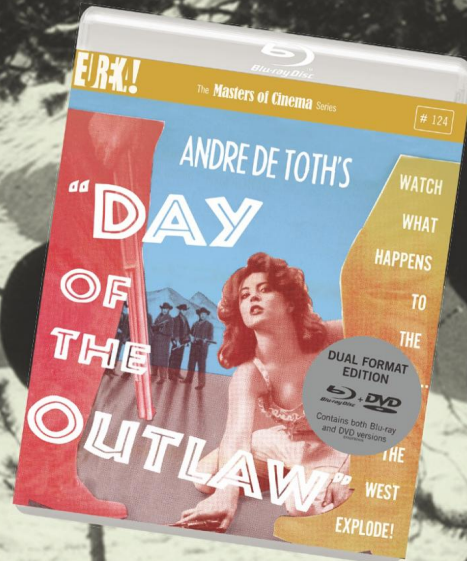
##### FILMS OF THE YEAR: 2015

The ballots are in for our poll of the best films of 2015, voted for by 168 critics. **Nick James** introduces the results and asks what they say about the year's cinema PLUS **Pamela Hutchinson** looks at what 2015 had to offer lovers of silent and archive films, **Nick Pinkerton** surveys the year's action movies, **Nick Roddick** examines how new platforms affected the landscape of film distribution this year, and **Jemma Desai** and **David Edgar** consider how questions of representation and identity informed much of the year's most urgent and important critical discourse



**SPECIAL  
EDITION  
DUAL FORMAT  
AVAILABLE THIS  
DECEMBER**

ANDRE DE TOTH'S  
**"DAY OF THE  
OUTLAW"**



**EUREKA!**  
www.mastersofcinema.org

@mastersofcinema  
@eurekavideo

AVAILABLE FROM  
**amazon.co.uk**

Walter Matthau Elaine May  
**"A New Leaf"**



**SPECIAL  
EDITION  
DUAL FORMAT  
AVAILABLE THIS  
DECEMBER**

**EUREKA!**  
www.mastersofcinema.org

The  
**Masters of Cinema**  
Series

@mastersofcinema  
@eurekavideo

AVAILABLE FROM  
**amazon.co.uk**



## PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BFI

## Editorial enquiries

21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN

t: 020 7255 1444

w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

e: S&amp;S@bfi.org.uk

## Social media

f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag

t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag

## Subscriptions

t: 020 8955 7070

e: sightandsound@

abacusemedia.com

Volume 26 Issue 1 (NS)

ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Adam Batty** writes about film at [hopelies.com](http://hopelies.com)**Geoff Brown** writes on film and classical music for the *Times***Dan Callahan** is the author of *Barbara Stanwyck: The Miracle Woman* and *Vanessa: The Life of Vanessa Redgrave***Ashley Clark** is a freelance film critic and film programmer, and the author of *Facing Blackness***Jordan Cronk** is a freelance film critic**David Curtis** is author of *A History of Artists' Film & Video in Britain***Sam Davies** is a freelance writer**Jemma Desai** is a film programmer at and the founder of I am Dora**David Edgar** is education curator, public programmes, at the BFI**Graham Fuller** is a freelance film critic based in New York**Simran Hans** is a freelance writer and programmer for the Bechdel Test Fest**Pamela Hutchinson** writes about film at [silentlondon.co.uk](http://silentlondon.co.uk)**Kevin Jackson**'s books include *Constellation of Genius, 1922: Modernism and all That Jazz***Edward Lawrenson** is a freelance writer and the co-director of the documentary *Abandoned Goods***Hannah McGill** is a freelance writer and critic**Adam Nayman** is a critic and the author of *It Doesn't Suck: Showgirls***Nick Pinkerton** is a New York-based film critic and programmer**Nick Roddick** is the author of several books on cinema**Jez Stewart** is curator of animation at the BFI National Archive**Giovanni Vimercati** is a freelance film critic**Ben Walters** is producer of *BURN: Moving Images by Cabaret Artists***Craig Williams** is a programmer in the Badlands Collective**Neil Young** is a film journalist and festival programmer

## COVER

Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Revenant*  
Retouched by DawkinsColor

## NEXT ISSUE

on sale 6 January

## Contents Reviews

## FILMS OF THE MONTH

68 *The Forbidden Room*70 *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2*72 *Sunset Song*

## FILMS

74 *All About Them*74 *Les Anarchistes*75 *At Any Price*76 *Bound to Vengeance*76 *Burnt*77 *By the Sea*78 *Chemsex*78 *Chic!*79 *Christmas with the Coopers*80 *The Closer We Get*80 *The Danish Girl*81 *Fathers & Daughters*82 *Grandma*82 *Grazing the Sky*83 *Heart like a Hand Grenade*83 *Hector*84 *The Honourable Rebel*84 *Ice and the Sky*85 *The Last Witch Hunter*86 *The Lesson*87 *Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension*87 *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict*88 *The Runner*88 *The Russian Woodpecker*89 *Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse*89 *Shaandaar*89 *Shelter*90 *The Show of Shows*91 *Sleeping with Other People*91 *Snoopy and Charlie Brown: The Peanuts Movie*92 *Soaked in Bleach*92 *Sparks and Embers*93 *The Sweet Escape*

## HOME CINEMA

96 *Abilene Town, Blind Chance, The Captive Hart, Devil in a Blue Dress, The Fallen Idol, The Honeymoon Killers, King of the Hill, The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane, On the Beach, The Raging Moon, Seconds, The Black Cats, Wind Across the Everglades*

## DVD features

94 **Graham Fuller** on the classic western *Shane*97 **Kevin Jackson** welcomes a revival of a rare film of T.S. Eliot's 1935 play *Murder in the Cathedral*98 **Jordan Cronk** dives deep into a trove of American avant-garde cinema103 **Lost and Found****Craig Williams** revisits Claude Chabrol's odd *Alice or the Last Escapade*

## Television

100 *Better Call Saul, Holding On*

## BOOKS

104 **Ben Walters** welcomes the latest instalment in Simon Callow's multi-volume Orson Welles biography105 **Michael Brooke** enjoys a slimline study of David Lean's epic *Doctor Zhivago*106 **Dan Callahan** on a biography of the legendary Douglas Fairbanks106 **David Curtis** on a survey of experimental film from Los Angeles

70



80



86



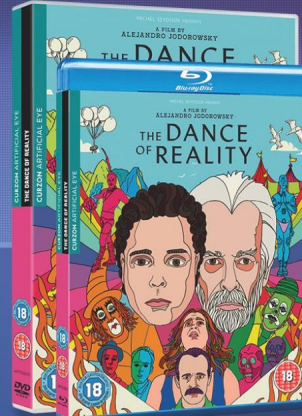
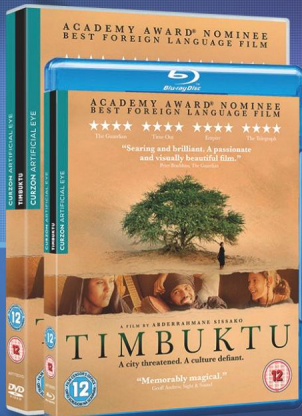
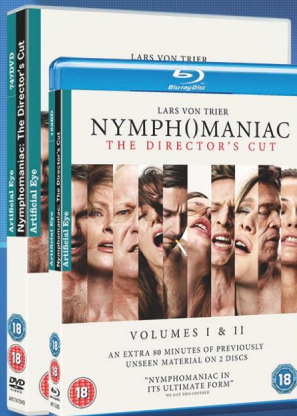
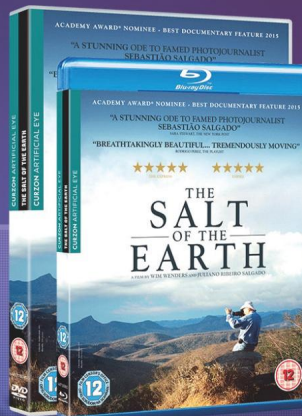
91

**And online this month** 2015 in review: all our poll entries in browsable form, plus spotlights on the documentaries, animation, DVDs of the year and more [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)



CURZON  
ARTIFICIAL EYE

# TAKE HOME ★ THE BEST ★ FILMS OF 2015



ALL AVAILABLE NOW ON DVD & BLU-RAY [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.



## EDITORIAL

### Editor

Nick James

### Deputy editor

Kieron Corless

### Features editor

James Bell

### Web editor

Nick Bradshaw

### Production editor

Isabel Stevens

### Chief sub-editor

Jamie McLeish

### Sub-editors

Robert Hanks

Jane Lamcraft

### Researchers

Mar Diestro-Dópidio

### Credits supervisor

Patrick Fahy

### Credits associates

Kevin Lyons

Pieter Sonke

James Piers Taylor

### Design and art direction

chrisbrowndesign.com

### Origination

Rhapsody

### Printer

Wyndeham Group

## BUSINESS

### Publisher

Rob Winter

### Acting publishing coordinator

Emma Corbett

### Advertising consultant

Ronnie Hackston

T: 020 7957 8916

M: 07799 605 212

F: 020 7436 2327

E: ronnie.hackston@bfi.org.uk

### Newsstand distribution

Comag Specialist

T: 01895 433800

### Bookshop distribution

Central Books

T: 020 8986 4854

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight and Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc. 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway NJ 08854

### Subscription office:

For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact: Subscription Department

Sight & Sound

Abacus e-Media

3rd Floor Chancery Exchange

10 Funnell Street, London, EC4A 1AB

T: 020 8955 7070

F: 020 8421 8244

E: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com

### Annual subscription rates:

UK £45, Eire and ROW £68

£10 discount for BFI members



Copyright © BFI, 2016

The views and opinions expressed in the pages of this magazine or on its website are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily those of the BFI or its employees. The contents of this magazine may not be used or reproduced without the written permission of the Publisher.

The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



# Editorial Nick James



## IN MEMORIAM

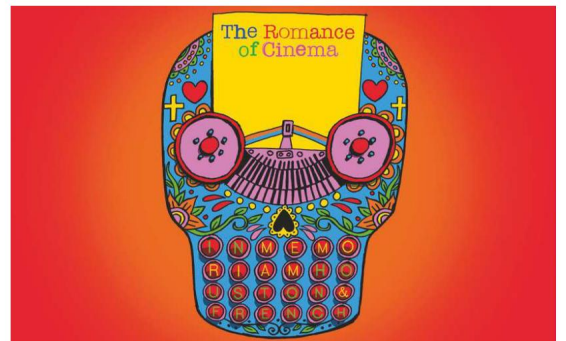
The coincidence of the recent deaths of Philip French, the film critic of the *Observer*, and Penelope Houston, the most enduring editor of this magazine, had an end-of-epoch feeling about it. I heard the two pieces of news in quick succession while on a trip, part-holiday and part-reportage, in Mexico, and feeling unwell. It was a sharp and somewhat isolating double blow. Penelope retired in 1990, so I didn't know her well, but Philip was someone I'd spent time with at festivals, as well as in London, and he was still writing for *S&S* as recently as July – a review of the book *The Lives of Robert Ryan* – when he told us it was 50 years since his first piece for the magazine and described himself as “a grizzled old-timer – the Walter Brennan of nostalgic criticism”.

We've put up much material about both these major figures online, including a very candid interview conducted with Penelope by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin, which I urge you to find time for. What struck me on reading all of the reflections on their lives was how strong the romance of film was in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and how successful their generation of writers was in cementing film in place as the seventh artform and in making it a subject of serious interest.

The names of popularly known directors like Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson, Luis Buñuel, Federico Fellini, John Ford, Jean-Luc Godard, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock and Satyajit Ray collectively evoke a time when writing about film, or criticism, was inseparable from its making. The same can't quite be said for, say, Pedro Almodóvar, Kathryn Bigelow, Jane Campion, Terence Davies, Claire Denis, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Abbas Kiarostami, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Michael Mann, Gus Van Sant, Lars von Trier, Wong Kar Wai or Zhang Yimou. There are a few genuinely famous directors of our time, of course – Martin Scorsese and Werner Herzog come to mind – but the connected success of auteurism and criticism in the French-Houston era has not been replenished to the same degree.

For my own generation of critics, a golden age of international cinema arguably began some time in the late 1980s and endured into the noughties, but it was centred on the 1990s. The directors on the second list above were central to that sense of worldwide experiment and new experience, yet they remain figures of importance for cinephiles only; their names have not broken into the mainstream imagination, perhaps because that 90s phenomenon was not a coherent experience for anyone except people on the

*During the recent Day of the Dead festivities in Mexico, when vigils at cemeteries are kept, Philip French and Penelope Houston were on my mind*



festival circuit. That would explain why there is not as strong a feeling of cultural imperative about seeing ‘the next Kiarostami’ as there was for ‘Fellini’s latest’ (though perhaps it still applies to new TV drama series).

In the early decades of cinema, films were not considered a serious phenomenon for study. The French-Houston generation of writers helped to change that, but what they had going for them was the fact that you could only see the film in the cinema during its run and under no other circumstances. Given those restrictions you can see how much easier it is to build a mythology around certain auteurs.

Why the 90s generation of filmmakers didn't achieve the same level of fame as their predecessors, or inspire a comparable legacy in related film criticism, may, in part, be down to the arrival of video in the 80s. One of the tendencies we've noted in our decennial poll of the Greatest Films of All Time is that there is far greater consensus about films made before video came along. Video granted critics the chance to watch any film as many times as they wanted, which can soon wear away the aura of any work. And that process of diminishing consensus has only become more powerful with the near tsunami of film releases we now deal with. Thus we live in less romantic, more pragmatic cinema times, and our heroes' reputations are perhaps more modest.

One of the reasons I went to Mexico was to witness the wonderful Day of the Dead festivities. On the night in question, when vigils at cemeteries are kept, Philip and Penelope were on my mind, as was my friend Chris Collins, the film producer, who died on that day one year ago. I want to mention, too, Dr Clifford Shaw, a recently deceased Sheffield man who was a great supporter of the BFI. As one learns from the Mexicans, it's good to be festive about the passing of those whose contributions have been so positive. The memory of Philip and Penelope should inspire us to do two things: first, to think again about 1990s cinema, to see it more as a coming together of international talents rather than a constellation of separate careers; second, to help make new cinema once more central to cultural life, to make it romantic again. ☺



IN THE FRAME

## FLICKERING FLAMES



Tales from the bedroom: Robert Morgans's *Bobby Yeah* features in a retrospective of his work

As the London International Animation Festival kicks off, we check the health of the UK's animation sector

By Jez Stewart

Picture the suitcase of the British animation enthusiast: plastered with stickers from criss-crossing the land to attend animation events. Exeter in February, Edinburgh in June, Bristol in September, Bradford in November, London in December, and then every other January it's time to hit the programme for the BAAs (as the biannual British Animation Awards have become known).

Aside from the notable efforts of Aardman, most recently with *Shaun the Sheep Movie* (2015) and more forgettable developments such as *Postman*

*Pat: The Movie* (2014), British animated features are as rare as hen's teeth. There are high hopes for the BFI-backed *Ethel & Ernest* (scheduled for 2016), but British animation rarely gets near the repertory circuit, let alone the multiplex. The supporting film programme that saw, for example, shorts such as Bob Godfrey's *Kama Sutra Rides Again* screen alongside Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (both 1971) has long disappeared. The festival circuit is now the public forum for the industry.

Different events have different flavours: Bristol mixes live action and animation to celebrate short film in general while in Edinburgh animation is a small but important strand of the full festival programme, centred around the McLaren Award. But string them together, with a mix of local animation screening clubs in between, and the picture could be regarded as a rather rosy one.

The disappearance of Exeter and Bradford

from the 2015 calendar reveals some cracks in that facade. Thankfully, a new Manchester Animation Festival this November filled this gap in the north-west – an important development given the history of animation production in the city and its resurgence.

But while some plaster can be applied to these fractures, there are more profound problems with the foundations of the animation sector. In the 1990s 'Channel-4 era', the broadcaster had a remit to commission independent and diverse content. A generation of animators were given the opportunity to take risks and innovate, and awards flooded in. Not a year went by during that decade without a British film in the Best Animated Short category at the Oscars, and in 1993 three of the five nominations were British.

Many of that generation are still around, and at the London International Animation Festival (LIAF) in December, two of them have must-see retrospectives. Barry Purves made a string of stop-motion mini-masterpieces in the 1990s, but since 2000 he has managed just two films, with funding from France and Russia. Robert Morgan won plaudits and fans with such films as *The Cat with Hands* (2001) and *The Separation* (2003), but his frustration at finding backing for follow-up projects ended up in the self-financed bedroom project *Bobby Yeah* (2011) – a 23-minute expurgation that brought international awards and a Bafta nomination.

In recent years there has been no dedicated funding for producing animated shorts. Programmes and awards categories are dominated by work by students, who enjoy a freedom and support that is hard to replicate independently. Two-thirds of the films nominated for best short animation at the Baftas since 2011 have been graduate films from just three courses, the Royal College of Arts, the National Film and Television School and the Edinburgh College of Art. To follow the animation calendar year on year can feel depressingly like a glimpse at the next generation of talent whose potential will go to waste due to lack of resources to help it develop. The prizes that NFTS film *Edmond* by Nina Gantz has gathered at festivals around the world this year suggests that this trend may continue in the short term, although the recent tax credit scheme for animation is reviving the professional industry.

### James Benning

The films of the maverick American formalist rarely get a big-screen outing so don't miss the opportunity to see a selection of his recent films at HOME, Manchester, from 6-17 December, including 'One Way Boogie Woogie 2012' and his six-shot film of the Ruhr Valley, 'Ruhr' (2009, right).



### 'A New Leaf'

"A masterpiece of discretion and plain, old-fashioned charm" was the MFB's verdict on Elaine May's 1971 feature debut. May's four films as director are hard to see in the UK, so Masters of Cinema's DVD and Blu-ray release this month of her black comedy about a broke New York playboy (Walter Matthau) on a mission to marry May's millionaire botanist, is very welcome news indeed.



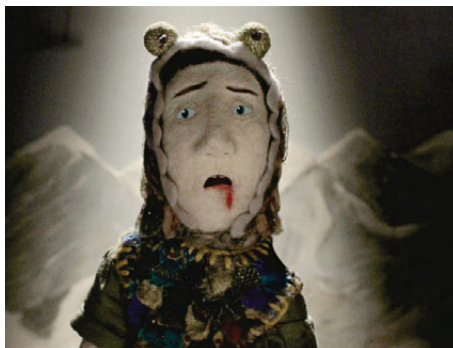
ON OUR  
RADAR





Body of work: Barry Purves is also the subject of a festival retrospective, including his 2011 short *Plume*


But enough of the gloom, as there are plenty of good news stories out there. LIAF takes its festival on tour beyond the capital, with its director Nag Vladermersky reporting particular success in Scotland. There has also been a renaissance in production north of the border, particularly in the work of White Robot partners Will Anderson and Ainslie Henderson. LIAF also works in partnership with Picturehouse to curate bi-monthly screenings of alternative children's animation for Saturday morning kids'



Toon gloom: Nina Gantz's 'Edmond'

clubs in 25 cinemas. The BAAs – celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2016 – bring mainstream media attention to British animation, with the Public Choice screenings playing a vital part in the contemporary scene to wider audiences.

The Lottery-backed BFI Film Audience Network is being used to support a number of programming developments, "from the ground up" as Animate Projects' Gary Thomas puts it. Its *Move It* project aims to build a network of animation programming to support and build on events happening in isolation. *This Is Not a Cartoon* organises showcase screenings of the best international animation with an emphasis on director Q&As to build on audience understanding.

Of course, there is more to be done. As Vladermersky says: "Without the passion for the artform from our small team – mainly of volunteers – there would be no LIAF." Marketing these events to the animation community is relatively easy; gathering and maintaining the interest of the general film enthusiast is where investment needs to be made. 

 **The LIAF takes place at venues across London from 4-13 December. The programme will tour UK cinemas in 2016**

## Quentin Tarantino

Tarantino's much anticipated western 'The Hateful Eight' arrives in UK cinemas on 8 January. It stars Samuel L. Jackson (right) and Kurt Russell as warring bounty hunters and Jennifer Jason Leigh as a fugitive prisoner who are stranded together when they take shelter during a blizzard. And throughout January the BFI Southbank, London, will be showing all of Tarantino's works on original film prints so you can observe the evolution of his career from 1992's 'Reservoir Dogs' to 2012's 'Django Unchained'.



## 'The Man in the High Castle'

Ridley Scott was mooted to direct a BBC adaptation of Philip K. Dick's chilling 1962 alternative history imagining Germany and Japan as World War II victors. But it is Amazon that has ended up making it (right), with Scott in a producer role and 'The X-Files' veteran Frank Spotnitz as 'creator'. The pilot was one of Amazon's most popular earlier this year and all 10 episodes are available on its Prime streaming service.



## LISTOMANIA WARRING COUPLES

Taking our cues from Angelina Jolie Pitt's *By the Sea* (see p.77), we look beyond romcoms to survey films about tempestuous relationships

- 1 **Why Change Your Wife? (1920)**  
*Cecil B. DeMille*
- 2 **The First Born (1928)**  
*Miles Mander*
- 3 **Trouble in Paradise (1932)**  
*Ernst Lubitsch*
- 4 **The Awful Truth (1937)**  
*Leo McCarey*
- 5 **Mr. & Mrs. Smith (1941)**  
*Alfred Hitchcock*
- 6 **Adam's Rib (1949)**  
*George Cukor*
- 7 **Divorce Italian Style (1961)**  
*Pietro Germi*
- 8 **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966)**  
*Mike Nichols*
- 9 **The War of the Roses (1989, below)**  
*Danny DeVito*
- 10 **Happy Together (1997)**  
*Wong Kar Wai*



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH DAVID LEAN

'I love making movies. If I wasn't paid to do it, I would pay to do it.'

David Lean's *Doctor Zhivago* is currently on rerelease in select UK cinemas





# FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

Walt Disney, Alfred Hitchcock and Lars von Trier assemble for a festive celebration of campanology in cinema



**By Hannah McGill**

Church bells can be cause for celebration or for lament, and so have the power to evoke both delight and wistfulness in Christians and people raised in predominantly Christian communities. The powerful imaginative link between bells and Christmas fits with this duality, joy at the birth of Christ bearing with it the awareness of his coming agony and sacrifice. Church bells also serve as a stern prompt – a directive to get oneself to church, and, even for non-churchgoers, a marker of the passage of the day – and so carry the further association of duty. There's also the belief, albeit more pagan in origin than Christian, that the sound of bells serves to drive away evil; and the Buddhist tradition that the purity of their sound drives out confusion and promotes wisdom.

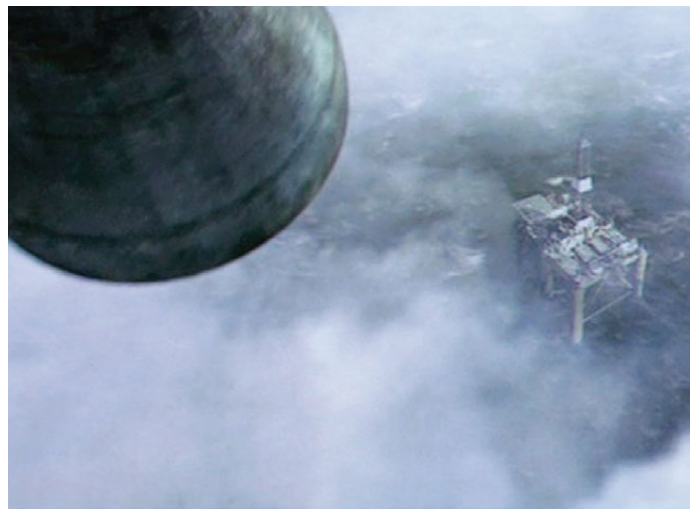
All of these associations are deliberately triggered in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996), in which great joy precipitates terrible suffering, and the notion of marital 'duty' is expanded to include the sacrifice of personal safety. The asceticism of the Scottish island community that is home to Bess (the young protagonist played by Emily Watson) is signalled by the fact that its church has no bells. (While von Trier is typically loose about where, what and whom he's depicting, it is true that the Scottish Free Presbyterian Church has traditionally frowned upon church bells, as upon all musical instruments during services. Indeed, the year after the release of *Breaking the Waves* saw a dispute break out on the Isle of Skye, where filming took place, between a Church of Scotland that used bells and a nearby Free Presbyterian Church where sermons were consequently disturbed.) Nonetheless, after Bess has been degraded, killed and refused a proper burial by her church on the grounds that she is a sinner, bells ring out across the island. These bells are visible in the frame as if suspended from the camera, von Trier implicitly positioning himself – at least in the eyes of some critics – as approving Bess's sacrifice on God's behalf.



The poster for Irving Pichel's 1948 tearjerker



Ring cycle: the church in *Breaking the Waves* (1996) has no bells



Dead ringers: bells signal the tragic finale of *Breaking the Waves*



Lord of the rings: Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939)



High notes: the church tower in *Vertigo* (1958)



Von Trier is rarely so straightforward. His bells are at once a miracle that defies the churchmen's cruelty, and a blasphemy that defies the authority of any God or church. In its crowning of a tragic saga with a burst of kitsch wish-fulfilment, *Breaking the Waves* also plays on Hollywood's awkward engagement with religion, as exemplified by the 1948 Frank Sinatra tearjerker *The Miracle of the Bells*, in which God makes his presence felt while the church bells of a whole town are tolling to mark the untimely demise of a locally born actress. As an outsider in her community, born strange but imbued with saintly purity, and finally sacrificed for love, Bess also recalls the deafened bellringer Quasimodo, of Victor Hugo's much filmed 1831 novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

A church tower becomes the site of another inadvertent self-sacrifice in *Vertigo* (1958), which ends on the ominous sound of the mission bell tolling to remind Scottie (James Stewart) of all that has been set in motion by his obsessive faith in love. Indeed, the nun who startles Judy (Kim Novak) into stumbling and falling to her death seems to be in almost unseemly haste to ring the bell, as if aware that her very purpose there has been to cause, observe and mark the tragedy. In terms of how Scottie experiences events, death is built into the fabric of the mission church and its bell, just as it is embodied in the film's ancient redwoods and the portrait, jewellery and grave of Carlotta Valdes.

The bells had barely ceased tolling for *Vertigo* when Novak and Stewart reunited in *Bell, Book and Candle* (1958), for which Paramount loaned Stewart in return for having borrowed Novak for *Vertigo*. The three items in the title form part of a historic Roman Catholic rite of excommunication, in the course of which a bell was rung, a holy book closed and candles dashed to the ground. The story of *Bell, Book and Candle*, to suit its light

*Church bells serve as a stern prompt – a directive to get oneself to church – and so carry the association of duty*

supernatural purposes, misunderstands or re-appropriates the rite as being one of exorcism.

*Bell, Book and Candle* is also a decidedly festive film, first released on Christmas Day in 1958. The music over its opening credits ensures its audience is in the correct spirit by quoting the yuletide standard 'Jingle Bells'. As will be crushingly evident to many readers by the time this column appears in print, so strong is the association between the sound of bells and Christmas that it takes but a sprinkling of chimes to evoke the season to film and television audiences.

Indeed, Disney was jingling Christmas bells even before it had sound at its disposal: the newest and oldest addition to a Disney completist's canon is the long unavailable, now restored 1928 silent short, *Sleigh Bells*, which depicts the Christmas antics of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. 📺

## THE FIVE KEY...

# FILMS ABOUT SISTERS

As two leading US female comics team up to play bickering siblings, we survey cinema's finest portraits of sisterhood

By Anna Coatman

"They don't get any closer than this," quips the tagline to *Sisters*, the new Amy Poehler and Tina Fey movie (reviewed in next month's *S&S*) in which grown-up siblings Maura (Poehler) and Kate (Fey) are reunited when their parents decide to sell their childhood home. Much of the comedy hinges on the fact that they are polar opposites tied together; working as a double-act, Fey plays the fun-loving, young-at-heart foil to Poehler's more uptight, mature-acting character. This same-but-different trope is common in films about sisters, where personality clashes can be sources of comedy, love, desire, empowerment, mystery and sometimes misery – as these five examples show.



## 2 What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? (1962)

Family ties are made literal in this grotesque masterpiece about a long-standing sibling rivalry turned toxic. Former child star 'Baby' Jane Hudson (Bette Davis) is the alcoholic carer-turned-captor of her sister Blanche (Joan Crawford), who was left paralysed by an accident (or was it?) years earlier. Bound by a lifetime's worth of resentment and jealousy, the sisters live together in a dusty old Hollywood mansion.



## 4 The Virgin Suicides (1999)

In Sofia Coppola's haunting adaptation of Jeffrey Eugenides's novel, four sisters suffer the consequences of the youngest's suicide. Cosseted away at home, they become objects of mystery, longing and identification for the boys in their neighbourhood. Their story is a tragic one, and Coppola's intelligent film prompts the question: would things have worked out differently if the protagonists had been brothers?



## 1 Sisters of the Gion (1936)

Omocha (Yamada Isuzu) is a geisha with modern sensibilities; scornful of her work, she uses her intelligence to exploit the men who seek to exploit her. By contrast, her sister Umekichi (Umemura Yoko) believes in the customs she practices. But ultimately, neither way of playing the game works and in Mizoguchi Kenji's tragedy it's the system itself that traps them.



## 3 Hannah and Her Sisters (1986)

Woody Allen's classic follows the tangled romantic lives of three Manhattan sisters, Hannah (Mia Farrow), Lee (Barbara Hershey) and Holly (Dianne Wiest): a kind of carousel of love/lust objects for Hannah's husband (Michael Caine) and ex-husband (Allen). The film explores the relationships between the women – who are all pointedly different – but is equally preoccupied with the desires of the men.



## 5 Frozen (2013)

The success of Disney's *Frozen* wasn't only thanks to its catchy songs: this sparkling animation wriggled free from the cliché of the princess being rescued by her prince, replacing it with a celebration of sisterhood. The conventional romantic love story is weeded out, and the relationship between sibling heroines, outgoing Elsa (Idina Menzel) and isolated Anna (Kristen Bell), is allowed to blossom.



Celebrate cinema this Christmas



ORDER NOW **zavvi.com**

FREE DELIVERY ON EVERYTHING

Prices are correct at time of going to press. Zavvi.com reserves the right to change prices. Subject to availability

[zavvi.com/soda-pictures](http://zavvi.com/soda-pictures)



# THE FORBIDDEN ROOM

★★★★★  
"A PURE,  
BUBBLY JOY"

*Little White Lies*



*Guardian*

a film by

GUY MADDIN and EVAN JOHNSON

★★★★★  
"AN EXPERIENCE  
LIKE NO OTHER"

*The List*



*Time Out*

ROY DUPUIS · CHARLOTTE RAMPLING · MATHIEU AMALRIC · AMIRA CASAR · LOUIS NEGIN  
CLARA FUREY · GERALDINE CHAPLIN · ARIANE LABED *and* UDO KIER

IN SELECT CINEMAS DECEMBER 11





# TALK OF THE TOWN

Cecile Emeke's small but singular body of online work reveals a filmmaker determined to tell stories on her own terms

By Simran Hans

Cecile Emeke's filmography may be limited in size but it reaches far and wide. From *Lines*, a short film that asks black women to look back on the lyrics of songs they once loved, to her web series *Ackee & Saltfish*, a hang-out comedy about two best friends living in East London, Emeke filters intellectual and political concerns through a loose conversational style.

Unconcerned by the traditional trajectories of her contemporaries – the 23-year-old left her maths degree to make movies – Emeke is creating films on her own terms. Though her work is available online, she recently screened to London cinema audiences a longer cut of *Strolling*, a walking-and-talking documentary series that traverses several European cities, with black men and women speaking about the after-effects of colonialism. Exploring racism as a diasporic concern, the project sees Emeke's subjects discuss the nuances of global social, political and economic injustice from distinctly personal perspectives, flitting between frank challenges to patriarchy and dismissals of everyday micro-aggressions ("My hair's normal. Your hair is weird to me – it's all flat and straight and weird colours – and when it goes in the water, it sticks to your face. Can I touch your hair?"). Emeke asks the questions but eschews voiceover. And yet there is still the sense that a one-woman investigation is taking place, her handheld camera evoking an atmosphere of intimacy and *flâneur*-like digression.

**Simran Hans:** *Strolling* might be termed a walking-and-talking film: you interview your subjects on the go. What is the appeal of this approach?

**Cecile Emeke:** I wanted *Strolling* to capture as closely as possible a real conversation, which for me often happens when I'm on the move. It also gives a rhythm to the episodes, especially with the music. I try to use music to reflect the energy of the conversation or the person.

**SH:** You fund your own films and you also use crowd-funding. Is that a choice, or is it the only way you are able to make them?

**CE:** Yes [it is a choice]. There are bits of money out there, but you have to go through a lot of bureaucracy to get it, and often the money is for specific formats. At the same time, no, it's not my choice, because there's not really funding for web series. I could've gone through funding processes [for *Strolling*], but I would've had to change it, and I didn't really want to, so I thought, 'OK, I'm just going to scrape together some money and make it.'

**SH:** *Strolling* started as a web series, but it has also screened in cinemas. How do you want audiences to receive your work?

**CE:** Each method of showing your work serves a different purpose. There's some people who will see my work online and will not go to a screening. Of course, it's really great experiencing your work in a cinema and seeing how that audience reacts.



Walkie talkie: Cecile Emeke's *Strolling* features black men and women discussing colonialism's legacy

**SH:** Is music something that inspires you?

**CE:** Definitely, I think more so than other filmmakers. I don't think I've seen films that have made me feel the same way as a certain song or book has. It's because music is a much more immediate form. Films take years to make, so the things that are happening in society now, we're not necessarily going to see reflected in film. You can make a song today and release it tomorrow. It's also not elitist. There are so many different perspectives and emotions and viewpoints and energies in music that I don't always see in film.

**SH:** Lena Dunham said that the most generous thing you can do as an artist is to leave "a trail of your creativity". How do you feel about the fact that your entire filmography is online?

**CE:** I'm just experimenting. [The work I'm making is] all that stuff people do in film school that no one ever sees.

**SH:** *Ackee & Saltfish* is about two girls in their twenties; in *Strolling* you talk to young people. What is it about youth culture that you're drawn to?

**CE:** I've never seen it as focusing on young people.

*I can't imagine what it's like to be someone who makes films and never has to think about the structures that oppress people*



Cecile Emeke

A lot of the people in the films – especially *Strolling* – they're not young. The oldest person I've interviewed is 52, that episode is about to come out soon. You know language can be very subtly coded... Are [critics] describing the people in *Strolling* as 'youth' to reduce their agency – to kind of project disempowerment on to them? Every time somebody says [*Strolling* is a youth film], I feel a little pang and think: "No, I don't like that." Historically when black people were children, they were seen as adults, and when they're adults, they're seen as children.

**SH:** Do you ever feel the burden of representation as a black British filmmaker?

**CE:** I don't think you can represent everyone. It's not possible, so I definitely don't try to. But I'm aware of the reality that in the media there is a very narrow, homogenised view of black people, and that I am one of the few people who is making work about black people. I know I should logically feel pressured, but I don't really. At the core of everything I do, I just want to make stuff that I would want to see.

**SH:** What are the challenges of making films as a woman of colour?

**CE:** When there's a culture that preserves certain values and only those values, it stops other people from entering those spaces [to make work]. Even though I'm in that space, I've felt that pressure. I just can't imagine what it's like to be someone who makes films and never has to think about the social structures that oppress people. You don't always want to be reacting to these systems, but it's your reality, so you can't not. I can't exist outside of race. I can't exist outside of gender. But at the same time, every film I make shouldn't have to be about black feminism. It always will be though. It always will be, because I'm making it. That's changing a lot though. With technology, it's cheaper to make films, and things are kind of opening up. Hopefully we'll see different voices and different stories.



Cecile Emeke's films can be viewed at [cecileemeke.com](http://cecileemeke.com)



tiff.40 toronto  
international  
film festival  
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2015

BEST NORDIC FILM  
AUDIENCE CHOICE  
Göteborg Film Festival

27th  
Galway Film Fleadh  
Best International  
First Feature

CELESTINE  
JULIEN  
MARTIN

Crystal Bear  
Generation  
65

BFI LONDON  
FILM  
FESTIVAL

# MY SKINNY SISTER

(MIN LILLA SYSTER)

A FILM BY SANNA LENKEN



"BEAUTIFULLY AND UNOBTUSIVELY SHOT...  
A TENDER PORTRAIT OF TEENAGE ANGST"

CINE VUE

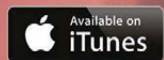


"GENERATES CONSIDERABLE TENSION AND POIGNANCY..  
A TOUCHING AND INSIGHTFUL EXPLORATION"

TOTAL FILM

IN SELECTED CINEMAS & ON DEMAND

## 27TH OF NOVEMBER



CURZON  
HOME CINEMA

matchbox films

# GRAZING



# THE SKY

"Illustrates beautifully the hard work and  
dedication of the world of circus artists"

Tim Roberts - National Centre for Circus Arts, London



In selected cinemas  
& on demand  
**11th of December**



CURZON  
HOME CINEMA

matchbox films



## SPY GAMES



Bond films remove the process of getting places so radically they can feel dreamlike – recalling another post-colonial product, *Doctor Who*



**By Mark Cousins**

The Bond film *SPECTRE* comes along, and its marketing shows cars and watches in our faces. It muscled in on our street scenes and TV screens,

plastering its advertising everywhere, as if we live in some totalitarian Bond state. Even its star, in grumpy interviews, seems to resent it. And its premise – licensed to kill – is dodgy as fuck. The great Taiwan-based director King Hu suggested the Bond worldview is a white supremacist one.

And yet. The latest Bond movie is cinematic. It uses techniques from the very first years of the movies. One of its pleasures is the way it arrives in location after location, country after country, with a big enough budget to find the angle to film that country which most emphasises the sublime. Cityscapes, desertscapes, mountainscapes: the scapes line up like lantern slides. This elision of the spaces between them (Bond movies hate nowhere, the everyday) creates a dream logic, a feeling of skipping from awe to awe. The impulse is the same as in those earliest travelogue films by the brothers Lumière. Once they realised that movies could capture the sites of the world, they could not send their camera people out fast enough to show us those sites. The giggly impulse in the Lumières is still there

in *SPECTRE*. No surprise, perhaps, as cinema is younger than roller-skates and barbed wire.

This dream logic has been called the cinema of attractions. Bond movies dance the seven veils. They are Salome – seducing us, yet close to death. Mizoguchi pulls his camera back when one of his characters cries, to detach us from her pain, but a Bond movie would find this as inconceivable as nowhere. In a Bond movie, everything's a money shot.

Jumping in space is the stuff of cinema, but they're also a pointer to another way of thinking about Bond. He's like Doctor Who. *Doctor Who* came three years after the movie of *Dr. No*. Both Bond and the Doctor are rootless renegades, products of the post-colonial imagination. Britain no longer runs large parts of the world, but the two most popular fictional men in our culture think they police it. They imagine they are what stands between us and oblivion. The Doctor is more liberal than Bond, but you can feel the mirror neurons of each echoing the other. There have been 12 television Doctors and seven big-screen Bonds. Sydney Newman, who initiated *Doctor Who*, also launched *The Avengers*, Bond's close TV cousin. Clothes have been key to both characters – think of Bond's Turnbull & Asser cuffs, etc. Bond and the Doctor are closer to Noël Coward than they know – Coward advised Connery on his look.

More revealing is how Doctor Who's sense

*Doctor Who's sense of space-time resembles James Bond's. The latter can be somewhere instantly as if he has a TARDIS we just don't see*

of space-time resembles Bond's. The latter, like the former, can be somewhere instantly. It's like he has a TARDIS that we just don't see. A TARDIS is an elision machine, just as film editing is an elision machine. No mainstream movies elide more than the Bonds. They remove the process of getting to places so radically that they become almost dreamlike.

It's been said before, but this dreamlike, instantly somewhere else, string of set pieces structure owes much to Hitchcock, especially *The 39 Steps* and *North by Northwest*. Time in such films is a squeeze box: it expands to create suspense within the set pieces, then contracts to reduce the amount of "boring" time between them. For a man who flaunts expensive watches, Bond seems scared of real time. He never queues or waits. Doctor Who zips about in it. Neither just subjects themselves to it, to its contemplative pleasures.

But perhaps it's in their sense of the enemy that Bond and the Doctor most reveal their shared post-Empire, Cold War roots. Both believe in an organised, exterminating presence in the world: *SPECTRE* and the Daleks. Each has looked back at the origins of such iniquitous intent and found there trauma. The Daleks are organic material, housed in conical machines. Aren't Blofeld, and Bond's other adversaries, something similar, former humans encased in hi-tech volcanoes or desert command centres, barking "exterminate" at the world? Christoph Waltz's dialogue in *SPECTRE* could be spoken by Davros.

These are the reasons I haven't given up on Bond movies. They're full of unconscious material, and cinematic material. I hate the cocky swagger with which 007 walks into casinos, but I love his invisible TARDIS, that thing called film. 📺



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## RADIATOR



Still water: in Tom Browne's *Radiator* Daniel (Daniel Cerqueira, left) returns to the Lake District to help care for his elderly father (Richard Johnson, right)

Self-financing a film undoubtedly offers great freedoms, but these can come at a price, as the director of the acclaimed drama *Radiator* found

**By Charles Gant**

By any measure, 47-year-old Tom Browne took a meandering path to his feature-directing debut *Radiator*. Studying English at Oxford, he acted for Ben Hopkins in a production of Steven Berkoff's *Greek*, and proceeded to perform in Hopkins's early shorts and first feature *Simon Magus* (1999) billed under his acting name Tom Fisher. The pair then co-wrote *The Nine Lives of Tomas Katz* (2000), with Browne – or, rather, Fisher – in the title role.

Hopkins's next two features were documentaries, and Browne returned to jobbing acting, earning roles in the early 2000s in *Enigma*, *The Mummy Returns*, *Shanghai Knights* and *Van Helsing*. He wrote a 30-minute short for Channel 4's *Coming Up* series, and wrote and directed the 2009 short *Spunkbubble*, starring Martin Compston and Aidan Gillen. But it was only while starring opposite Gillen in Jamie Thraves's 2010 micro-budget oddity *Treacle Jr.*, that Browne found the confidence to embark on his own feature film. "*Treacle Jr.* had shown me what was

possible," he recalls. "You've got to have someone with a camera, someone recording the sound, and a script, and that's pretty much all you need."

Browne turned to his actor friend Daniel Cerqueira, whom he'd met performing at London's Royal Court theatre. "Neither of our acting careers was going particularly well," says Browne. "I proposed to him that I would write something that he would star in and I would direct."

But Cerqueira wasn't so impressed with what Browne came up with. "It was about an elderly aristocrat, living in poverty, an alcoholic; she'd been the mistress of a very wealthy man, and was hoping she would get some crumbs from his table, but it never materialised. Her son – ie, Danny – was helping her survive."

Although Browne "ran out of steam" before completing this screenplay, he did have a location: his parents' holiday home in the village of Mosedale in the Lake District. The house was a chaotic jumble and overrun with mice, and remained a source of anguish for Browne. As he explains, "I knew it had a very distinctive atmosphere that would work well in a film. I showed the script to Danny, and he was immediately: 'What is this house you're describing. Why is it like that?' He finally said, 'You must write about your parents.'"

While Browne was happy to exploit the Cumbria farmhouse, he was much less sure about making his parents the subject of the drama: his irascible father, a retired doctor and psychoanalyst, was refusing to allow his wife, now his full-time carer, to get outside help. "It seemed so ridiculous to think it would ever actually happen, I don't think I really thought through what they would then make of it," says Browne. He never found out; both died before the pair had reached the final draft of the script.

The two men worked together for two-and-a-half years, occasionally pausing when one or other landed an acting gig. Browne says: "We didn't do any of the things that you're supposed to do. We didn't ever have a plot. We never knew what the ending was. We began at the beginning, and wrote one scene after another. Danny was fascinated by my family dynamic, which I wasn't. He had much more faith in it as a project, and had to put up with a lot of moaning from me."

While Browne and Cerqueira identified as callow outsiders, connections formed by two decades of work – and life – now proved helpful in raising the £140,000 budget. In particular, Browne's wife Rose Garnett, then a freelance script editor (now at Film4), showed the *Radiator* screenplay to her good friend Rachel Weisz, who responded positively, signing on as executive



producer. Garnett also had a connection to Bond producer Barbara Broccoli, who boarded in the same capacity. A third friend, Mel Agace, the producer of *Destricted*, led them to Rattling Stick, an ad agency branching out into film production.

"The good thing about making a low-budget film when you're middle-aged," Browne explains, "is that you probably do know some people who've made a bit of money, who you can then tap up. Also, you've worked on a lot of films. Knowing crew made a huge difference. You know their spirit, and they in turn trust you not to get them into some piece of rubbish."

Essentially a three-hander, *Radiator* early on found its female lead, Maria, in Gemma Jones (*Bridget Jones's Diary*), with whom Browne had shared a scene in *Shanghai Knights*. Cerqueira was always set to play the adult son who is summoned by a desperate Maria to try to get her husband Leonard to rise from the couch. For the latter role, casting director Fiona Weir championed Richard Johnson, who was born in 1927 and had made his name in playboy roles in 1960s films. "I couldn't really see him as Leonard, which was very stupid," Browne comments. "He gives this very special performance," he says of the actor who died last year.


*Radiator* premiered at the BFI London Film Festival in October 2014, earning encouraging reviews from the trade press, but no sales. "I was very naive about the London Film Festival," says Browne. "We did our best to

*You've got to have someone with a camera, someone recording the sound, and a script, and that's pretty much all you need*

get distributors to see it, but we just couldn't get them to come. It was a bit dispiriting."

With no sales agent representing the film, getting further traction from film festivals was a challenge – "We didn't know the ropes at all." Only after a series of prize wins at the festivals that did accept *Radiator* – including Nashville, Sarasota, Dallas, Galway and Transilvania – did prospects brighten. In September, nearly a year after its festival debut, *Radiator* finally acquired a sales agent, helping the film achieve proper attention from over-stretched programmers. It's now been invited to festivals that initially rejected it, says Browne.

And now, thanks to the support of Picturehouse chief booker and acquisitions boss Clare Binns, *Radiator* is finally getting a UK release. "There's a whole series of women that made this film possible and then available," says Browne.

"I don't know what we have been doing wrong, but we clearly had not been making ourselves heard," he adds. "If you do finance your film in the way we did, there are unquestionable benefits: you have freedom to make the film you want to make. But when you get out the other side, you've got no support, and also you're an unknown quantity. It was very difficult to get people interested." 

 **Radiator** was reviewed in last month's issue and is out now in select UK cinemas

## THE NUMBERS BROOKLYN

By Charles Gant

Two years ago, when producers Finola Dwyer and Amanda Posey brought *Brooklyn* to Lionsgate UK, there were certainly plenty of positives to consider. Chief among them was Nick Hornby's screenplay, adapted from the Colm Tóibín novel. And, crucially, Irish rights were included in the deal. Explains Lionsgate UK boss Zygi Kamasa, "We saw it as an immediate hook for the Irish market, who are very patriotic to local films. Our approach was: let's make this, do brilliantly in Ireland, and hope to do well in the UK also."

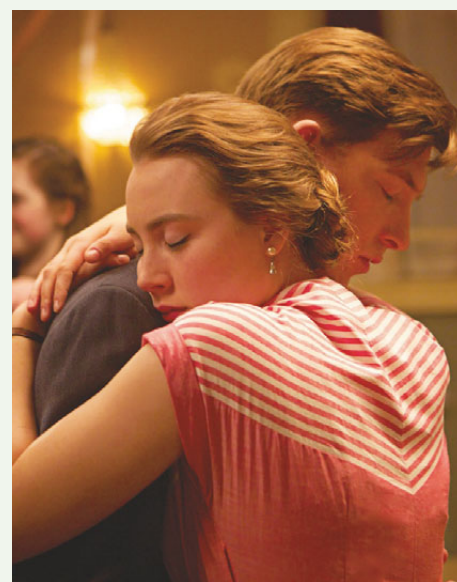
Those hopes became firmer when they saw the finished film. "You do never quite know when you acquire a script, however good the filmmaker and cast are," says Kamasa. "When we saw the movie, and it was so strong, we realised it would work everywhere."

Initially, the plan was to release in Ireland first, establishing it as a hit there, and then follow in the UK three weeks later. Says Kamasa, "Saoirse Ronan is the lead, not that brilliantly well known in the UK. Julie Walters and Jim Broadbent are great names but are in small roles. We didn't have an anchor like, dare I say it, Cate Blanchett in *Carol*."

Lionsgate abandoned the platform strategy, partly thanks to enthusiasm from UK critics and cinema bookers being shown the film, aligning the UK date with Ireland's 6 November. Adds Kamasa, "And the end of November, apart from our own *Hunger Games*, you had *Bridge of Spies* and *Carol*: both very good, both very different, but both also targeting that slightly older audience."

The earlier date offered competition, too, but Lionsgate fancied its chances better going up against Bradley Cooper chef picture *Burnt* and documentary *He Named Me Malala*. "We did our analysis, and felt we could stand on our own two feet in the UK on this date," says Kamasa.


Cinema chains agreed and offered aggressive bookings on the release date, but Lionsgate proceeded with caution, playing at every possible cinema in Ireland, but just 220 in the UK. The strategy paid off, with a



Holding tight: *Brooklyn*

£1.04 million opening in the UK and Ireland, including £432,000 in the latter territory, delivering an overall site average of £3,381. Thanks to the older-skewing audience, midweek business was exceptionally robust, and the film then expanded on the second weekend, helping it to a ten-day total of £2.78 million.

Despite strong reviews, trumpeted in a marketing campaign that included a 30-second *Downton Abbey* spot, there was always the danger that broader cinema audiences would view *Brooklyn*, for all its charms, as somehow less than a must-see proposition. The film has happily avoided that fate.

Kamasa sees the film as resonating with a UK population that has never been more uprooted, and which a year ago took another uplifting film about the immigrant experience – *Paddington* – to its heart. "It's not just about going from Ireland to America; it's about leaving home," he says. "Most of us these days have done that in our lives. It seems to have gelled with people. Everyone has been homesick." 

### IRISH FILMS AT UK/IRELAND CINEMAS

Film	Year	Gross
Mrs. Brown's Boys D'Movie	2014	£14,724,978
Philomena	2013	£11,445,513
The Commitments	1991	£8,285,701
Angela's Ashes	2000	£7,753,488
Michael Collins	1996	£7,442,995
Waking Ned	1999	£7,055,261
In the Name of the Father	1993	£4,936,163
In Bruges	2008	£4,898,165
The Guard	2011	£4,614,654
The Wind That Shakes the Barley	2006	£3,906,765



# THE HABIT OF ART

## BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Challenging cinema would be better served if we could encourage younger viewers to adopt the film-going habits of the over-55s



**By Ben Roberts**

Here's a fact: two of our most bankable film stars are women aged 80: Dames Judi Dench and Maggie Smith.

I'm writing this as

*The Lady in the Van*, which stars Dame Maggie, opened in the UK behind *SPECTRE* with £2.2 million in a weekend – that's roughly the same as the Smith/Dench blockbuster *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, which ended up taking more than £20 million in UK cinemas.

Of their other recent films, the *Marigold* sequel (£15 million+), Dame Judi's *Philomena* (£11 million+), and Dame Maggie's *Quartet* (£8.5 million) have all been watched in big numbers by older (over 55) viewers – a section of the UK cinema audience which, according to our Research and Statistics Unit, has been growing steadily in the last few years, rising from nine per cent of the total in 2008 to 12 per cent in 2014.

This is also an audience with a strong preference for British films, especially independent ones. A gift to distributors and cinemas, this audience doesn't rush to a film on its opening weekend but fills cinemas in the middle of the week (and the day), and generally helps films enjoy a longer run.

Look at this year: Andrew Haigh's *45 Years* has taken close to £2 million – really strong for a film on limited release (it was released simultaneously on video on demand); Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette* is going to take more than £10 million; and John Crowley's *Brooklyn* has just opened very well (I'd guess it will end up with more than £6 million). Todd Haynes's *Carol* will be on release by the time you read this and is expected to do similar business.

The irony is that *Carol*, *The Lady in the Van*, *Brooklyn* and *Suffragette* were all released within a matter of weeks, a mad pile-up as distributors join the awards gold rush and swerve Bond – and not so good for an audience underserved for much of the rest of the year. That said, this audience is better catered for by live theatre, which continues to draw big numbers in one-off events. NT Live's *Hamlet* with Benedict Cumberbatch took almost as much in a series of one-off cinema events as the entire run of StudioCanal's *Macbeth*. As Shakespeare might say, "Go figure."

So what's the lesson here? Make more films for older audiences, obviously.

It makes commercial sense. BBC Films figured this out a long time ago, which

*Over-55s are a gift to distributors – they fill cinemas in the middle of the week and generally help films enjoy a longer run*



Box-office gold: Maggie Smith

is why films that play to a typically older audience are the mainstay of their slate.

There is a tension for us though in this demand for the type of drama and comedy that appeals to older audiences and our role in bringing up new filmmakers, encouraging creative and challenging material, and supporting films which sit outside the mainstream. Only a few filmmakers, like Haigh, have quickly and successfully straddled both.

The older audience is reliable (predictable, even) and growing, and is easy to reach in terms of traditional marketing. By contrast, getting that slippery younger audience of any size into the habit of adventurous film watching is getting harder.

The largest cinema-going audience remains 15- to 24-year-olds, at around 31 per cent of the total. But of course they gravitate towards more mainstream action films, and they go mostly to the more commercial cinemas, and are harder to reach with advertising and social media. They are happy to Netflix-and-chill. Interestingly, 45 per cent of the audience for *The Wolf of Wall Street* was under 25, as was 37 per cent of the audience for *Interstellar*, but plenty of great independent films deserved bigger, younger audiences this year: *Catch Me Daddy*, *Slow West*, *The Falling*, *Tangerine*, even Denis Villeneuve's *Sicario*.

Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Lobster* (£1.2 million and counting) has been one of the few arthouse hits this year to appeal to a younger crowd – and by 'young' I mean an average age of 35. Picturehouse did a great job releasing it, building hype around the film and cast, and confidently positioning it as a dark comedy and an unconventional love story. Nevertheless it still played stronger, and for longer, in independent cinemas.

There are a couple of obvious ways to try to nudge younger audiences into more adventurous film habits. Day-and-date releases are increasingly important, to capitalise on our growing VoD habits. More experimentation with pricing and subscription models, like the BFI's own £3 rush tickets. I do wonder how comparethemarket.com's two-for-one ticket scheme is working compared with the previous Orange/EE Wednesday campaign (young people have phones, do they all have insurance?). And, of course, we can all be making smarter films in genres – comedy, horror, crime, for example – that they actually want to watch. @bfilben

## IN PRODUCTION

● **Ken Loach** has started shooting a project entitled *I, Daniel Blake* in Newcastle, despite rumours that 2014's *Jimmy's Hall* would be his last narrative feature film.

The film is based on a script by Loach's longtime collaborator Paul Laverty, and follows a carpenter who has to turn to state welfare after falling ill, and who meets a single mother also reliant on state help.

● **Todd Haynes**, fresh from the critical success of *Carol*, is set to reunite with his one-time muse Julianne Moore, star of Haynes's *Safe and Far from Heaven*, for a project entitled *Wonderstruck*. The film is based on the children's book of the same name by Brian Selznick, author of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*.

● **Xavier Dolan** has lined up a cast including Jessica Chastain, Kit Harrington, Susan Sarandon, Kathy Bates... and mega-selling UK singer Adele in a small role for his next feature *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan*.

The film reportedly concerns the shockwaves that occur after the correspondence between a movie star and an 11-year-old actor is exposed. Dolan directed the video for Adele's recent comeback single 'Hello'. ● **Cate Shortland**, the Australian director of *Somersault* and *Lore*, has completed production on *Berlin Syndrome*. The film is based on the novel by Melanie Joosten, and stars Teresa Palmer as a photojournalist who becomes imprisoned by a man with whom she has a holiday romance.

● **Mel Gibson** is another director to be working with the in-demand Palmer, on the World War II drama *Hacksaw Ridge*. The film is based on the true story of US army medic and conscientious objector Desmond T. Doss, who was nevertheless awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his service in the Battle of Okinawa. The cast also includes Andrew Garfield, Vince Vaughn, Sam Worthington and Hugo Weaving.

● **Noel Clarke** (below) is set to shoot *Brotherhood*, the final instalment in his UK urban drama trilogy, following the success of *Kidulthood* (2005) and *Adulthood* (2008). Clarke himself will reprise his role as Sam Peel.





★★★★★  
 "Warm, witty and seductive:  
 Moretti's best film since  
*The Son's Room*"  
 Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

★★★★★  
 "Touching, nicely nuanced...  
 brilliantly acted"  
 Donald Clarke, The Irish Times

  
**WINNER**  
 Ecumenical Jury Prize  
 CANNES 2015

★★★★★  
 Empire

Margherita BUY  
 John TURTURRO  
 Giulia LAZZARINI  
 Nanni MORETTI

# MIA MADRE

A FILM BY PALME D'OR WINNER NANNI MORETTI



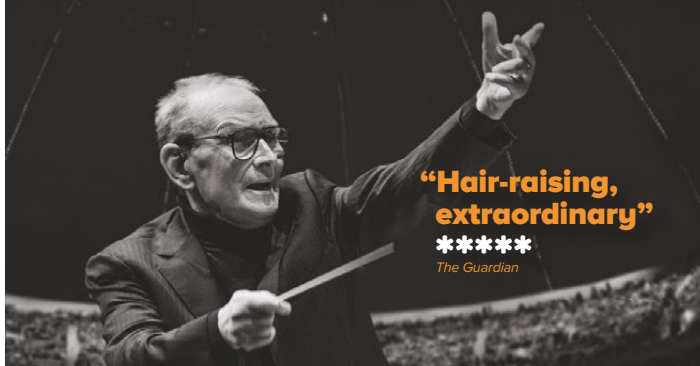
OUT NOW ON DVD & BLU-RAY™

MiaMadre.co.uk

CURZON  
ARTIFICIAL EYE

## ENNIO MORRICONE

THE 60 YEARS OF MUSIC TOUR  
 LIVE WITH 200 MUSICIANS AND SINGERS IN A NEW PROGRAM



"Hair-raising,  
 extraordinary"  
 \*\*\*\*\*  
 The Guardian

COMPOSER OF QUENTIN TARANTINO'S UPCOMING

*The Hateful Eight* AS WELL AS *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*,  
*Once Upon a Time in the West*, *Once Upon a Time in America*,  
*A Fistful of Dollars*, *The Untouchables*, *The Mission*,  
*Cinema Paradiso*, *The Best Offer* & Many More

OVER 500 SCORES FOR CINEMA AND TELEVISION • OVER 100 ABSOLUTE MUSIC WORKS

**TUE 16 FEB 2016 THE 02**

WWW.ENNIOMORRICONE.ORG

PLATINUM TICKETS AVAILABLE  
 LIVENATION.CO.UK | TICKETMASTER.CO.UK | AXS.COM

LIVE NATION PRESENTS

## AN EVENING WITH CLINT MANSELL

PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

A PERFORMANCE OF FILM MUSIC FROM THE ACCLAIMED BRITISH COMPOSER OF  
 REQUIEM FOR A DREAM, THE FOUNTAIN, NOAH, PI, MOON AND MORE

MARCH 2016

WEDNESDAY 23  
 BIRMINGHAM  
 SYMPHONY HALL

THURSDAY 24  
 LONDON  
 ROYAL  
 FESTIVAL HALL

SATURDAY 26  
 GATESHEAD  
 SAGE

TUESDAY 29  
 GLASGOW  
 ROYAL  
 CONCERT HALL

LIVENATION.CO.UK | TICKETMASTER.CO.UK  
 CLINTMANSELL.COM



CALLING ALL MUSIC FANS



DOWNLOAD THE LIVE NATION APP

Available on the  
App Store

ANDROID APP ON  
Google play



## PENELOPE HOUSTON, 1927-2015

*Sight & Sound*'s longstanding editor was a key participant in, as well as an observer of, the great art-cinema boom that began in the 50s

By Henry K. Miller

In February 1947 Penelope Houston, then reading modern history at Somerville College, Oxford, reviewed a think-tank report on British film policy for the student weekly *Isis*. Noting that three of its four proposals had already been adopted, she concluded by endorsing the unfulfilled fourth: "That the somewhat moribund but valuable British Film Institute should be reconstituted and set firmly on its feet." Scarcely more than two years later, she would take a leading role in this enterprise when she and her equally youthful colleagues on the short-lived magazine *Sequence*, including the screenwriter Gavin Lambert and filmmaker Lindsay Anderson, were asked to take over the BFI's publications. In 1956, having served as his deputy, she replaced Lambert as editor of *Sight & Sound*, and over the next 20 years she made it the world's leading film magazine.

Houston herself recognised that the early years of her editorship marked an extraordinary period in film culture; as she wrote later, the 1960s produced "a whole range of film images that imposed themselves very powerfully, from the figures in Antonioni's north Italian landscapes to the corridors of *Alphaville*; from Kubrick's monoliths in space to Resnais's chateau lost in time". But Houston's *Sight & Sound* was participant as well as observer in the great art-cinema boom which began with the 'Bergmania' of the late 1950s, addressing a readership that more than doubled by the mid-1970s. Expanding its horizons well beyond western Europe and the US, it earned its billing (from 1963) as "The International Film Quarterly".

Despite all this, she is best known for her part in a local skirmish over auteurism which has been consistently misinterpreted as a result of the popular misconception that before *Cahiers du Cinéma* came along no one had known one Hollywood director from the next. In her 1960 essay 'The Critical Question', Houston responded to attacks made on *Sight & Sound* by the undergraduate critics of *Oxford Opinion* (later of *Movie*), and took the fight to their idols in Paris; but her question "Ray or Ray?" (ie, Nicholas or Satyajit) had less to do with the clash of art and commerce than with the young critics' refusal to relate art to experience. As she pointed out, *Sequence* had helped to get Nicholas Ray's debut *They Live by Night* (1948) released in the UK. Later she wrote, with well-modulated sarcasm: "*Sequence* wrote about Ford's Westerns and Minnelli's musicals; *Movie* about Preminger's melodramas and Minnelli's non-musicals."

In truth, Houston was less enthusiastic about post-war Hollywood than her *Sequence* colleagues, but largely because she held in greater esteem



Critical success: Penelope Houston edited *Sight & Sound* from 1956-90

the earlier Hollywood of Garbo, Hepburn, the Marx Brothers, and Preston Sturges, "that auteur before the name if not before the fact". (For related reasons she preferred Hitchcock's British work.) While still a student she wrote that Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) was "one of the few recent films which have checked Hollywood's headlong leap into mediocrity, and can stand up in any company".

With this in mind, the line in 'The Critical Question' most revealing of Houston's own critical sensibility might be her observation that "there does not seem to be much appreciation for the consciously cynical and sophisticated" in the auteurs' writing. Conversely she once praised Richard Winnington, film critic of the *News Chronicle* and an early supporter of the *Sequence* gang, for his "pleasant astringency", which captures something of her own style quite well. Describing a conversation with

*In its 1960s heyday Houston's Sight & Sound was serious, but not burdened with the need to proclaim its seriousness*

Pauline Kael, whom she had brought into *Sight & Sound* as a virtual unknown in the early 1950s, Houston recalled that her contributor was under the impression "that the English were not quite serious. 'You English are so flippant,' she sighed, when I once suggested that the New York film press took a slightly exaggerated view of its own importance."

In its 1960s heyday Houston's *Sight & Sound* was serious – she published Susan Sontag on Bergman's *Persona* (1966) – but not burdened with the need to proclaim its seriousness. Houston felt that it was in any case difficult for anyone working in the BFI's hugger-mugger Soho offices to assume the "mantle of self-importance" – and she regretted the later era of "staidness and empty corridors". Moreover, the decade, though "in many ways shoddy, dangerous and discredited", was for Houston and her colleagues a time of "sheer energy and sense of opportunity", and not conducive to excessive introspection or nostalgia. In addition to the magazine, in 1967 she oversaw the publication of the earliest entries in the BFI's landmark book series Cinema One, the first two of which were written by her key contributors Richard Roud (on Godard) and Tom Milne, her deputy (on Losey).



Although Houston's star had risen alongside such future directors as Anderson, Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson, neither their films nor British cinema in general received much in the way of special treatment. In 1970, after she had written of *If...* (1968) that "Anderson is still lashing out at Nanny", Anderson and Reisz, as BFI governors, tried to get her fired and to turn the magazine into an institutional house journal which would bang the drum for the national product. Though they failed and Houston's independence was preserved, Milne left as a consequence of the row (fortunately he remained a contributor). Roud had departed for New York not long before, and as the 1970s wore on Houston was increasingly isolated from the rest of the BFI, then embroiled in a series of grinding political battles. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith describes her tuning out of top-level meetings, "preferring to study the racing form-book while listening with half an ear in case something was said which might affect the interest of the magazines".

Despite these unhappy circumstances, *Sight & Sound* reached its circulation peak in 1974, and the magazine was perhaps stronger than ever. For all that *Sight & Sound* was a target of the rising generation of film theorists clustered around the journal *Screen*—Peter Wollen once damned it as being populated by "intelligent, cultivated people who shared an ability to 'write well'"—Houston actually moved with the times very effectively. A not untypical issue of 1976 features Stuart Hall on "Television and Culture", Lucy Fischer on Tati (with an afterword by Jonathan Rosenbaum), and Fassbinder on Chabrol; and the magazine consistently published original historical research. Even when she made her disengagement with the contemporary scene explicit, at the turn of the 1980s, it was on the grounds that the required "shake-up of ideas and assumptions similar to that provided twenty years ago" had not been forthcoming. She chided the voters in the 1982 decennial critics' poll as "astonishingly conservative".

Able to recall a time when "neither film-makers nor filmgoers felt the need to look back over their shoulders, remembering how it had been done before, or to play games consciously with the genres", she was not fitted for the postmodern 1980s; but her study of the critical form-book




**Standard issue:** Houston with Gavin Lambert in the *Sight & Sound* office

remained keen, as is demonstrated by her use of the brilliant and frequently playful postmodernist Gilbert Adair. Still, the film culture which her magazine had helped shape was changing, indeed becoming a videocassette culture, a shift epitomised by the closure in 1986 of London's Academy Cinema, whose advertisements had adorned the back cover of *Sight & Sound* since the winter of 1958, the season of Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and Satyajit Ray's *Aparajito* (1956). She was persuaded to step down towards the end of 1990 (at about the same time as her Somerville contemporary Margaret Thatcher).

The two books she wrote subsequently reflect on the film culture in which she was formed in the 1940s. The *Sequence* writers were sceptical about what press critics hailed as the "Finest Years" of British cinema, whose special quality was often attributed to the introduction

of documentary technique to the feature film. Houston herself wrote in 1947 that "although admirable in small doses, documentary technique is not always a good training ground for fiction"; 45 years later her BFI Classic on Alberto Cavalcanti's *Went the Day Well?* (1942), a case in point, found that the director was no ordinary documentarist, and that his film was "the joker in the British wartime cinema pack".

Published in 1994, *Keepers of the Frame*, her history of film archives, is a partial history of the valuable aspects of the BFI before she arrived, and more obliquely a kind of meta-history of film, concerned not with the passing images which might appear on this or that strip of inflammable celluloid, but with the heroic and initially haphazard enterprise of keeping it in being; and then with its mutation into electronic media. Describing the rise of home viewing with just a hint of nostalgia for the bad old days, she wrote that "films which the archives had jealously guarded, which they had treated as unique, rarities to be shown only to researchers on their own premises or at best in small cinemas under their control, were finally out in the open". The achievements of Houston's protagonists, such characters as Iris Barry, Henri Langlois and Ernest Lindgren, were apt to be taken for granted; and the same could be said of her own. 

**i** A longer tribute to Penelope Houston appears online at [bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/penelope-houston](http://bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/penelope-houston) featuring reflections and memories from many of her former colleagues and contributors. The website also hosts extracts from an extended interview with Penelope conducted by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin in 2006 for their book on the BFI's history, in which she discusses her time as S&S editor

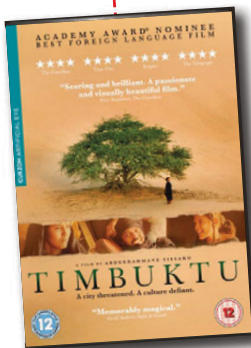


**Three of Houston's critically renowned books on cinema, including a BFI Classic on *Went the Day Well?***



# best of 2015

**timbuktu**  
also available on blu-ray



**a girl walks home alone at night**  
also available on blu-ray



**wild tales**  
also available on blu-ray



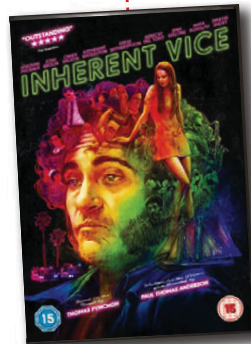
**leviathan**  
also available on blu-ray



**girlhood**  
also available on blu-ray



**inherent vice**  
also available on blu-ray



**winter sleep**  
also available on blu-ray



**love is strange**



**a pigeon sat on a branch reflecting on existence**  
also available on blu-ray



**the tale of the princess kaguya**  
also available on blu-ray



**gomorrah: series 1**  
also available on blu-ray



**house of cards: season 3**  
also available on blu-ray



**suck it and see**

**buy your cds, dvds and books from fopp  
– if they suck we'll give you a swap or your lolly**

This offer applies to all cds, dvds and books instore and is only available on production of a valid receipt dated no more than four weeks from the time of your original purchase. Goods must be in the condition as sold, both the sleeve/case, disc or spine/pages. We reserve the right to refuse this offer. This offer in no way affects your statutory rights. Titles subject to availability, while stocks last. Individual titles which appear elsewhere in the store, outside of this campaign, may be priced differently.

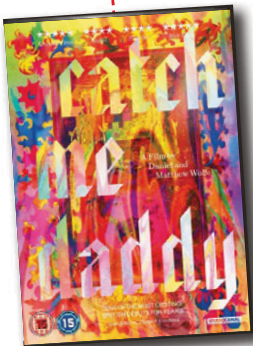


fopp stores

**bristol** college green // **cambridge** sidney st //  
**edinburgh** rose st // **glasgow** union st & byres rd //  
**london** covent garden // **manchester** brown st //  
**nottingham** broadmarsh shopping centre



**catch me daddy**  
also available on blu-ray



**phoenix**  
also available on blu-ray



**pride**  
also available on blu-ray



**force majeure**  
also available on blu-ray



**jordskott**



**kingsman:  
the secret service**  
also available on blu-ray



**wolf hall**  
also available on blu-ray



**the imitation game**  
also available on blu-ray

**girls: season 3**  
also available on blu-ray



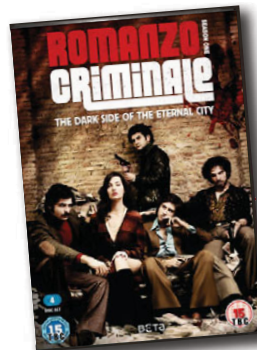
**gone girl**  
also available on blu-ray



**kon-tiki**  
also available on blu-ray



**romanzo criminale:  
season 1**



FoppOfficial

#gettofopp

fopp.com





PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF VESPA/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

**APOCALYPSE NOW**  
Having survived a bear attack, Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio) treks through a landscape stalked by death and desolation (right) in *The Revenant* by Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu (left)

# CALL OF THE WILD

*Alejandro González Iñárritu's decision to shoot key sequences of his true-tale revenge western 'The Revenant', starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hardy, in sub-zero conditions in the Canadian wilderness turned into a feat of Herzogian endurance*

**By Edward Lawrenson**

**Spoiler warning!**

An astonishingly gripping, big-canvas tale of survival and revenge set in the wilds of the US Midwest in the 1820s, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant* is inspired by the true-life case of Hugh Glass (played in the film by Leonardo DiCaprio): one of a number of fur trappers on a hunting expedition, he survives a savage bear attack, but is soon abandoned by his companions – and then sets out, as winter begins to bite, across territory which is largely still the preserve of Native Americans to find the man who left him for dead.

From the air-conditioned calm of the Santa Monica office where he edited the movie, Iñárritu reflects on the hardship of the shoot. One day in particular comes to mind: the location, a remote part of British Columbia where they shot a pivotal scene. Having fled the site of an ambush by Arikara tribal warriors, the trappers are now perched on a narrow mountain ledge, debating what to do with the gravely injured Glass. Winter is drawing in. Glass, trussed up in an improvised stretcher, is impeding progress. And the Arikara – or 'Ree' as the terrified whites refer to them – could return to strike at any moment. So Captain Henry (Domhnall Gleeson), the quasi-military leader of the group, makes the decision to press ahead, leaving the feverish Glass in the care of fellow trapper Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy) – with orders to bury him when, as looks increasingly likely, he succumbs to his wounds.

Talking to *Sight & Sound* a day after completing the film, Iñárritu is in a mood of garrulous enthusiasm and maintains a bright composure even when itemising the forbidding behind-the-camera conditions of this scene. "The location was extremely difficult to get to. It was a kind of cliff. It was also in an environmentally protected area; we had to build things months in advance so when winter came everything would be set for the trucks and the crane. It was a lot of planning, for the equipment, the horses, the security so that the trees wouldn't fall down and kill everybody."











## IMMIGRANT SONG

Working as a fur trapper, Glass (above) is a new arrival to Native American territory, like Fitzgerald, the companion who betrays him, played by Tom Hardy (below right), and their leader Captain Henry, played by Domhnall Gleeson (below left)



Complicating an already demanding set-up was the decision to film the sequence in a single take – reuniting Inárritu with *Birdman* (2014) DP Emmanuel Lubezki, the film extends the bravura, fluid, seemingly continuous camerawork of that movie, only in sub-zero wilderness conditions. Inárritu continues: “You have ten or so guys carrying Glass, then you see the massive landscape, and it’s all in one take, and it’s a very dramatic scene with lots of emotion and nuances, and you couldn’t move because you’d fall, and then we had to stop because it started raining, then one guy slipped and we had to deal with that, then the light was going... Most of the time we were doing this, I was saying: ‘What the fuck am I doing here?’”

It’s instructive to note that Inárritu cites this as an example of the kind of challenges he routinely faced,

not an exception. “There was no day when it was not difficult,” he tells me. “Every day was like a bear attack.” Filmed in chronological order in some extreme-weather conditions using only natural light, the shoot has already earned a reputation as a Herzogian endurance test, prompting Inárritu to interrupt his editing schedule in October to counter stories of a skyrocketing budget and troubles on set. For the record: the growing production costs, he and his fellow producers maintain, were largely down to unpredictable weather – plans for a snowbound finale to be shot in Canada had to be moved to Argentina because of disobligingly mild conditions in the original location – and while Inárritu admits that it was a tough shoot, he strikes me during our interview as a filmmaker who prizes meticulous preparation, an impression Lubezki confirms when I speak to him later on the phone.







*'The Revenant' is a compelling study in obsession, an absorbing and complex look at the shifting dynamics between the hunter and hunted played out on a sweeping scale*

Still, one can understand Iñárritu's frustration in having to respond to such stories before *The Revenant* was even complete. "I literally finished the film yesterday," he says. "This is the first interview I can do where we can talk about the fucking film." It's a fair point, because whatever the adversities of the shoot, this is a thrillingly accomplished picture, combining a ferocious physical and psychological intimacy with a sublime and immersive appreciation for nature at its most brutal and beautiful.

It is, at its most basic, a revenge drama. Having stayed behind with Glass only because of a cash inducement, Fitzgerald lacks the patience or compassion to tend to the injured trapper – and abruptly terminates his duty of care by dragging the half-conscious Glass into a shallow grave before fleeing. The episode has entered western folklore, with Glass memorialised as a figure of frontier resilience. But Iñárritu and his co-screenwriter Mark L. Smith have added to the most commonly told version the presence of Glass's son Hawk, a Pawnee-speaking teenager whose Native American mother was killed (we learn in Glass's hallucinatory flashbacks threaded through the film) by a US army raid on the tribal home she shared with Glass. Desperate to leave, Fitzgerald's brutal treatment of Hawk, witnessed by his father lying immobile on his stretcher, spurs Glass's quest for vengeance.

Having scrambled out of his grave, Glass begins his pursuit. Still recovering from his wounds, he has to flee those Ree warriors, encounters a kindly Pawnee-speaking hunter and has a run-in with rapacious French traders, all the while closing in on Fitzgerald. It's a compelling study in obsession, an absorbing and complex look at the

shifting dynamics between the hunter and hunted played out on a sweeping scale. Iñárritu had been developing the project before he started work on *Birdman*, but admits that many of its stylistic concerns – notably the virtuoso single-shot sequences – "wouldn't exist the way they do if it wasn't for *Birdman*".

The portrait of a former movie action hero struggling to acquire Broadway legitimacy told more or less in real time, *Birdman* was a break from the fragmentary, multi-character, chronology-shifting style of Iñárritu's earlier work – an invigorating, bracingly inventive and surprisingly playful embrace of linear storytelling. For the middle-aged director the results felt like a form of liberation – especially after the occasionally ponderous, portentous moments of *21 Grams* (2003) and *Babel* (2006). "I had fun with *Birdman*," he says when I ask how it influenced his approach. "It gave me a lot of new blood and possibilities." If *The Revenant* doesn't have the quickfire wit of Iñárritu's previous film – though it is studded with moments of meaty black humour – it shares with it a barrelling momentum and concentrated psychological intensity.

It helps that the film is anchored by DiCaprio's extraordinary central performance. The actor has already spoken of the lengths to which he's gone in pursuit of survivalist authenticity – eating raw buffalo liver, for instance, or crawling inside a carcass of a dead horse for warmth. These scenes certainly have an unfaked tang, and DiCaprio's commitment to the physically demanding set pieces is impressive. But it's also an unusually terse role for the actor – most of his few lines of dialogue are in subtitled Pawnee – and this has led to a performance of enormous subtlety. "It was a chance for him to explore something he hasn't done before – conveying emotions through your body language and your eyes," Iñárritu says. "It's an extremely difficult thing for an actor to do, and this is Leo [DiCaprio] in his best moment."

"It was an opportunity," Iñárritu adds, "[for DiCaprio] to play a vulnerable, fragile man." It's a telling remark. For all that his desire for vengeance propels him onwards, Glass remains, for much of the movie, either incapacitated by his injuries or, in the case of two pivotal interventions by Native American characters, dependent for his survival on the kindness of strangers. Then there's the bear attack itself, destined to emerge as the film's standout scene, a prolonged sequence of savage immediacy in which the lens is smeared with ursine drool and steams up with snorts of aggression as the creature tears strips from Glass. For much of this terrifying ordeal Glass goes limp or is even playing dead to avoid a further fatal swipe from the enraged mother. At times Glass isn't just vulnerable or fragile (as his name, by happy coincidence, suggests) – but passive, or at least at the mercy of circumstances beyond his control. Whatever else, it's a departure from the ethos of self-reliance and individualism that classic frontier tales have thrived on and perpetuated.

The same applies to Iñárritu's depiction of the trappers. Working for trading companies run along semi-military lines, these were the men who helped forge America's westward advance. Western literature and cinema tends to remember them as hardy pioneers; but for Iñárritu, whose extensive research showed him the importance of the fur trade to the American economy at the time, the trappers were part of a system that "was the beginning of deregulated capitalism".





◀ Wrapped in sodden fur and animal skin, their gaunt features barely visible behind messy nests of beards, this handful of mountain men, led by Captain Henry, are first glimpsed skinning the pelts from their kills. It is an image of unchecked ecological plunder, the muddy terrain soaked through with blood – and perpetrated by men on the brink of exhaustion. They seem less like embodiments of national exceptionalism as survivors of some unspecified apocalypse, or mercenaries fleeing a losing battle. As a bitter exchange between Fitzgerald and Henry reveals, wages were kept deliberately low and overheads high – which meant work was a matter of tooth-and-claw financial survival. It's not through any inherent villainy that Fitzgerald betrays Glass (though to be fair, Hardy gives a performance of cherishable cynicism); but simply the prospect of claiming his cash bonus on rejoining the other trappers.

Throughout it all is the larger, more starkly existential threat posed to Glass, Fitzgerald and the rest of the trappers by the coming winter. Switching from breathtaking wide shots of men engulfed in their vast surroundings to uncomfortable close-ups of the weathered features of actors buffeted by snow and rain, the presiding impression is of figures lost in an inhospitable environment. They are strangers to this land, immigrants no less (a point for which the Mexican Inárritu, also an immigrant to the US, admits to having a special affinity).

The keening, almost palpable sense of wintry desolation that imbues so much of the film is in no small part due, I suspect, to Inárritu's decision to shoot using only natural light. Landscapes and close-ups alike are illuminated by the cold white light of a low-hanging sun (with the exception of night-time scenes, in which fires provide one of the film's few 'artificial' light sources). The actors' breaths condense in the air – and, in a few of the many extreme close-ups that Inárritu shoots to plunge us into the midst of the action, even steam up Lubezki's lens. An advocate of the subtle variations in mood that shooting in natural light can bring, Lubezki credits the use of a new large-sensor ALEXA digital camera for making the most of the wintry conditions: "In a very weird way that camera was able to translate the way I felt when I was there [on location]," he says. "For example, a thing as simple as temperature: it's very hard to feel cold when you're watching a movie. But I felt that this camera, because of the sharp quality of the image at very low levels of light, was able to translate that much better than any camera before – including [celluloid] film. In those levels of light your eyes can see things that film can't."

While much of *The Revenant*, then, was dependent on relatively new digital technology, there is still something defiantly old-fashioned about Inárritu's insistence on real locations and on-camera spectacle. In an era when so many filmmakers are required to shoot logistically demanding sequences in green-screen studios, Inárritu took what he says was a "very difficult" decision to stand his ground. In one scene the trappers flee the Ree warriors down river by boat. With the men feeling exposed to further attack – "We got to get off this boat," Glass says, reversing the famous "Never get out of the boat" line from *Apocalypse Now*, a film whose ambitious production *The Revenant* echoes – the vessel is shrouded in an ominous mist.

"There was another river near [the battle location],"



*Switching from breathtaking wide shots of men engulfed in their vast surroundings to close-ups of weathered features, the impression is of figures lost in an inhospitable environment*

Inárritu explains, "and it was more affordable and logical to shoot there. But the river didn't have any danger. It was beautiful, but it didn't threaten you physically. You have to feel that. You can say a lot of things but film is about images. So we shot at that location, but it didn't work because it was so pristine – and I had to fight to go to a place that I wanted: it was in British Columbia, in a rain-forest, and there were cost implications, to fly people, fly the boat, all that shit. But it was really necessary. And you can imagine how blessed I was when finally I won that battle: it was huge, and we arrived and we have 18 hours of fog. I wanted to cry because honestly I could have arrived and it could have been a sunny day and it could have been as pedestrian as the first location. But I knew it had much more chance of rain and of chilly weather. It's incredible, and you feel it. If I would have surrendered to the other location it would have had a huge impact on your perception of the film."

If this anecdote offers a glimpse of some of the steely conviction Inárritu required to see *The Revenant* through on his own terms, he still laughs as he adds a self-mocking coda: "The most depressing thing was my daughter visited me in Calgary when I was shooting that scene. I showed her dailies and she said to me, 'Oh, father, it looks like Narnia.'" For new generations the reference is digital, now nature looks digital.

"On the surface it's very similar," he says. "But obviously it's never as beautiful and your eye always catches the fact it's unreal."

The comment prompts a final question about an avalanche in the film – seen briefly in the distance at a moment of crucial revelation for Glass. The cascade of snow occurs during a characteristically long take, and is coordinated so precisely with the camerawork and DiCaprio's performance I'd assumed it could only be a digital effect – albeit a faultlessly photo-real one. "Oh no, we created it in real time," he says with an almost matter-of-fact insouciance, as if the creation of avalanches was all part of the job description. "There was a helicopter, bringing the explosives; I was shooting, dolly in, tilt up – and boom." 📍

**SEEING THE LIGHT**  
Shot by *Birdman*'s director of photography, Emmanuel Lubezki, solely with natural light in remote locations, *The Revenant* (above) is a film of chilly majesty



**The Revenant** is released in UK cinemas on 15 January and will be reviewed in next month's issue



# best of 2015



the wonders



the fall: series 2  
also available on blu-ray



the legacy:  
season 1  
also available on blu-ray



dior and i



the legacy: season 2  
also available on blu-ray



selma  
also available on blu-ray



obvious child



listen up philip  
dual format edition



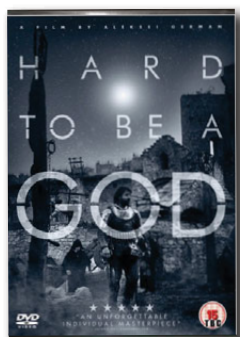
iris



good kill  
also available on blu-ray



hard to be a god  
also available on blu-ray



while we're young  
also available on blu-ray



suck it and see

buy your cds, dvds and books from fopp  
– if they suck we'll give you a swap or your lolly

This offer applies to all cds, dvds and books in-store and is only available on production of a valid receipt dated no more than four weeks from the time of your original purchase. Goods must be in the condition as sold, both the sleeve/case, disc or spine/pages. We reserve the right to refuse this offer. This offer in no way affects your statutory rights. Titles subject to availability, while stocks last. Individual titles which appear elsewhere in the store, outside of this campaign, may be priced differently.

fopp stores

bristol college green // cambridge sidney st //  
edinburgh rose st // glasgow union st & byres rd //  
london covent garden // manchester brown st //  
nottingham broadmarsh shopping centre



FoppOfficial

#gettofopp

fopp.com



# TREASURES FROM THE DEEP

A series of tales inspired by lost or abandoned films from cinema history are stitched into an elaborate mosaic in Guy Maddin and Evan Johnson's 'ectoplasmic splodge' of a movie *'The Forbidden Room'*, a work that revels in narrative complexity and playful, comic eroticism

By Adam Nayman

"There is a stirring in the balls of this movie," says Guy Maddin by way of describing *The Forbidden Room*, a deliriously brilliant comedy that's potentially readable – among many, many other things – as a metaphor for orgasm. After all, it begins in a damp submarine compartment crammed with male seamen yearning to breathe free, proceeds through a series of increasingly heightened dramatic interactions and ends with a literal series of 'climaxes', narratological money shots connoting euphoric release. Rarely has the end credit reel of a movie come with such a built-in sense of relief – accompanied by a dull ache of regret that the whole thing is actually over and done with.

This wouldn't be the first time the Winnipeg-born director has dabbled in comic eroticism, as anybody who has seen *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2003) or *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003) can attest. But with its fluid concentric stories about desire – inhabited by an eccentric cast of characters stationed deep in caves, beneath the waves and at the edge of volcanoes – *The Forbidden Room* may be the most hot and bothered work of the director's career. "The movie," he says with a grin, "is basically an ectoplasmic splodge."

Spewing out ideas and seeing what sticks is sometimes a dangerous strategy. The effect can sometimes feel a little like the moment in *Se7en* (1995) when Morgan Freeman surveys the grisly shooting scene and says: "Look at all that passion all over the wall." Fortunately, this is a highly controlled piece of filmmaking underneath all the mess. But make no mistake, things look plenty unruly at first glance. This may be the only film ever made to find room for a lycanthropic cult, a Filipino vampire, hypnotic regression, a demonic law firm, stolen squids, a mid-air Zeppelin collision and helpful bathing tips – though not necessarily in that order.

Reviews of *The Forbidden Room* are filled with such lists – none of which look exactly the same – but making an inventory of everything that happens across

its dozen or so nested narratives is a fool's errand, and explaining exactly how the film was produced is similarly complicated.

The production took place under the sign of Maddin's long-gestating *Hauntings* project, the original intention of which was to shoot adaptations of lost or abandoned films to be presented online. In 2012, this idea developed into the *Seances* project, which turned the film shoots themselves into a kind of art installation, and added an interactive online experience. Maddin and his co-director Evan Johnson staged and filmed a number of short scenes in front of the public at the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Phi Centre in Montreal, featuring actors ranging from arthouse stalwarts (Charlotte Rampling, Geraldine Chaplin) to Canadian-cinema mainstays (Roy Dupuis) to youthful newcomers (Clara Furey, who takes the ostensible lead as a scantily clad cipher named Margot). These were later stitched together end to end – and sometimes one on top of the other – to create *The Forbidden Room* by heroic editor John Gurdebeke, whose work here would surely merit awards consideration in an alternative universe where non-Hollywood movies were in with a shot.

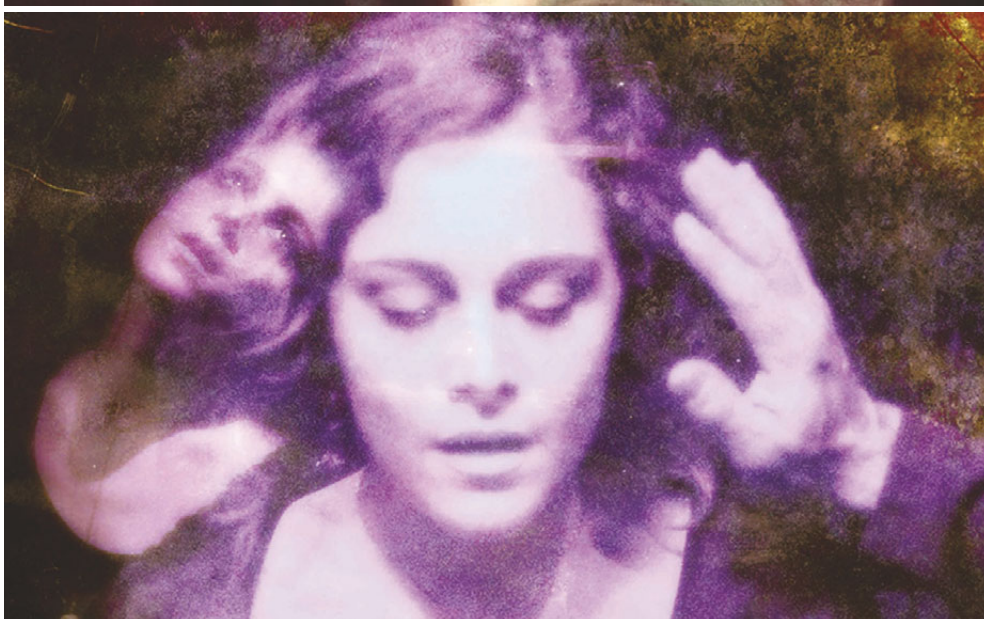
Each of the films-within-the-film is based on a real – or at least intriguingly apocryphal – historical source, including obscure works by Allan Dwan (whose lost 1914 short *The Forbidden Room* gives the film its title) and Naruse Mikio, among others. As such, Maddin and Johnson's film feels a bit like a cinephilic parlour trick, an affectionate cinematic black mass which pays tribute to outmoded yet still potent forms of storytelling. With its deliberately artificial imagery and (consistently hilarious) intertitles, it's also like a much, much longer version of Maddin's signature Eisensteinian short *The Heart of the World* (2000), although its two-hour running time allows the director to experiment with a far wider range of styles and allusions.

"We didn't want it to look like a total pastiche,"



**PASSION PLAY**  
*The Forbidden Room* (above) comprises a dozen or so nested narratives about desire which are inhabited by an eccentric cast of characters stationed deep in caves, beneath the waves or at the edge of volcanoes





explains Johnson, one of Maddin's former students who co-wrote the script and oversaw the post-production process. "It was important that we didn't totally pretend about all that stuff. For instance, even though we tried to make it look like it had been shot on film, there are all sorts of digital errors [in the image] that you can pick out." The surface of *The Forbidden Room* is riddled with glitches and imperfections, which paradoxically add up to one of the most impeccable presentations in recent memory. With its frantic compositions, stuttering jump-cuts and smeary colour scheme – all flared-out lighting and smudged flesh tones – it's an overwhelming sensory experience even without taking into account the informational overload of those intertitles – 420 in all. "We say that Guy is the world's greatest intertitle writer," says Johnson. "Admittedly, it's a dying art."

The intertitles were originally an afterthought: *The Forbidden Room* began as an experiment in crowd-sourced visuals. "I threw a number of collage parties with Canadian artists in the hope of getting a bunch of images that could be the basis for a script," says Maddin. "I wanted to base it on visuals, but [the pictures] didn't make it into the script – they all got pushed aside by words."

The sheer volume of exposition and dramatic context

contained within the intertitles is meant to be funny, but it's also daunting; instead of helping the audience get their bearings amid the torrent of images, the text only serves to plunge them deeper into the maelstrom of craziness. At the same time, a scrupulously attentive viewer – ie, somebody going back for a second look – will not only be able to keep up with the exquisite-corpse structure but note the dramatic and thematic resonances between the episodes, almost all of which pivot on an act of pilfering – appropriate for a movie that steals inspiration from a host of sources.

"When we were reading through the intertitles, certain words kept popping up," says Maddin, "and one of them was 'thief'. We're pretty up front about that. Most of my thefts and plagiarisms over the years have been a bit skulkier than this. It makes it more interesting if somebody suspects what the source material that's being stolen from might be."

Johnson adds: "We could have been a bit more assiduous in signposting the tributes we were doing, but in almost every case we're keeping away from the distinctive styles of those directors."

This balance between devotion and distance plays out in vignettes that feel like primal scenes

*This may be the only film ever made to find room for a lycanthropic cult, a Filipino vampire, a demonic law firm, stolen squids and helpful bathing tips*





transposed to some alternative dimension; when Udo Kier swaggers through an ensemble burlesque song and dance about rear ends by the band Sparks – poetically entitled ‘The Final Derriere’ – it’s a crazily fetishistic confection: Busby Berkeley by way of Buñuel. (It’s also impossibly catchy – during the Toronto International Film Festival, I heard at least two people humming it in the queues for other movies.)

“It would be pathetic if we were really trying to imitate Murnau or Sternberg or Mizoguchi,” says Maddin. “I mean, what’s the point? The conceit is that we were just the mediums channelling all this lost matter. And mediums speak in their own voices. If Winston Churchill is trying to contact you, you’d hear a bad Winston Churchill impersonation in the medium’s own voice. So this film is like an impersonation in our own voices.”

Shooting sequences for *The Forbidden Room* live in front of crowds of onlookers surely helped to contribute to the carnivalesque atmosphere on screen. “The most interactive aspect was that the set at the Pompidou Centre was constructed next to the most cruise-y bathroom in Paris,” says Maddin. “The actors and the crew members all had to use that bathroom. You went in and out of that ‘forbidden room’... the noises that came out of there: lots of flappings, marshland mating noises and ululations and grouings and scratching and things. People came back refreshed and ready to go.”

But the very public nature of the filmmaking was also a way for Maddin to generate the right kind of creative energy to work with following the disappointment of his previous feature *Keyhole* (2012), a surreal gangster noir the director regarded as less than an unqualified success. “I felt that I had been going through the motions,” he says. “I was mad at myself for dropping the ball on *Keyhole*, and vowed that the next film would be shot in public, where I would have to be this kind of showman, while I was directing. I’ve been a showman in front of a projection before; I’m used to having live elements at a screening, like I did with *My Winnipeg* [2007] and *Brand Upon the Brain!* [2006]. I liked being forced to stay in that mindset. But even so, anybody who does any sort of show will tell you that you quickly forget that other people are watching.”

Johnson adds: “It was actually just like making other movies. Ideally we would have just put the actors in a trance and the film would have just come out the other end 20 minutes later, but that’s not reality. There were several months of pre-production, and we had interns and storyboards and all that.” In the end, *The Forbidden Room* is as much a triumph of cutting as *mise en scène*. “Our editor shaved it and shaved it and shaved it,” Johnson says. “And even though it gets more relentless as it goes on, none of the narratives ended up getting cut out.”

Watching the film, it’s easy to forget certain plot threads, which is precisely the point of the enterprise; like *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) or *Raising Cain* (1992), the film is predicated on a pattern of immersion and interruption. The most extreme example of Maddin and Johnson’s narrative pranksterism might be a passage relatively close to the end in which a character played by Mathieu Amalric swaps clothes with a corpse in something close to real time. It’s a wilfully excruciating interval in a movie that mostly hurtles along through montage. “We wanted to give the impression that the



*It would be pathetic if we were really trying to imitate Murnau or Mizoguchi. What’s the point? We were just the mediums channelling all this lost matter*

movie might never end,” says Johnson. “New things keep starting up. It’s really sort of upsetting.”

Even the light at the end of the tunnel is kaleidoscopic: as *The Forbidden Room* winds up, it starts to parody the very process of resolution. The last act is framed as a chapter in ‘The Book of Climaxes’ – a string of endings unmoored from their stories. The idea of introducing even more material at this point to a movie bursting at the seams is audacious, and it also prompts some interesting thoughts about the strength of pre-programmed narrative mechanisms to whirl away on their own even without the momentum provided by the original tales.

“You can start a movie with something that plays like a climax,” says Johnson, “except then it’s not a climax – it’s more like a cold open. It’s all about where you put it.”

Maddin adds: “We were briefly discussing including a ‘Book of Cold Opens’. We also had a ‘Book of Tipping Points’, a ‘Book of Red Herrings’ and a ‘Book of Anticlimaxes’.” He says the inspiration for these ultimately scuttled ideas was a 1920s screenwriting manual called *Plotto*, which the filmmakers were shown by the poet John Ashbery (who wrote the monologue ‘How to Take a Bath’ specially for Maddin, who used it as one of many framing devices). “It’s like a big flow chart on how to write scripts,” says Maddin. “It’s a bit like Robert McKee [who wrote the screenwriting guide *Story*] but with a lot of arrows, like something a telemarketer would use. For instance, the story in the ‘derriere’ song was taken from *Plotto*, but we added the butts.”

Maddin says it’s going to be a while before he can exit the addled headspace of *The Forbidden Room*: beyond the film’s theatrical release, there’s still plenty of raw material left over for his website, including extended and alternative versions of each individual short film. If it all sounds like overkill, that’s part of the design: the question hanging over this amazingly entertaining film is whether it’s possible to get too much of a good thing. Maddin has mixed feelings about this, as well. “It’s eventually pulling out of all those concentric narratives that’s the most important thing,” he says. “Pulling out is my favourite part.”



**The Forbidden Room is released in UK cinemas on 11 December and is reviewed on page 68**

**IN THE PUBLIC EYE**  
Evan Johnson and Guy Maddin (above) shot sequences for *The Forbidden Room* in front of live audiences at the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Phi Centre in Montreal



# ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS

*A lone U.S. astronaut pitted against all the odds beyond this earth!*

**SPECIAL  
EDITION  
DUAL FORMAT  
AVAILABLE THIS  
NOVEMBER**



**THIS FILM IS  
SCIENTIFICALLY  
AUTHENTIC  
...IT IS ONLY ONE STEP  
AHEAD OF PRESENT  
REALITY**

**EUREKA!**  
www.mastersofcinema.org

@mastersofcinema  
@eurekavideo

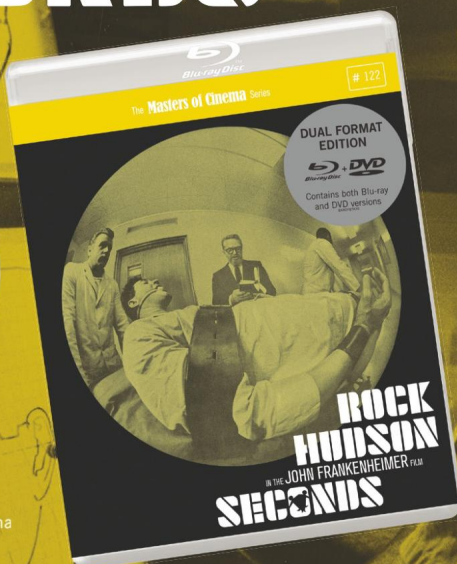
AVAILABLE FROM  
**amazon.co.uk**

# ROCK HUDSON

IN THE JOHN FRANKENHEIMER FILM

# SECONDS

**SPECIAL  
EDITION  
DUAL FORMAT  
AVAILABLE  
NOW**



**EUREKA!**  
www.mastersofcinema.org

The  
**Masters of Cinema**  
Series

@mastersofcinema  
@eurekavideo

AVAILABLE FROM  
**amazon.co.uk**









# IN A COLD CLIMATE

NORTHERN EXPOSURE  
Agyness Deyn as Chris  
Guthrie in Terence Davies's  
*Sunset Song*

Terence Davies's lush adaptation of the classic 1930s novel *'Sunset Song'*, which took 15 years to reach the screen, tells the story of a farming family's hardscrabble existence in the north-east of Scotland in the years leading up to World War I

By Nick James

**When I say I have never seen** Terence Davies looking so confident and full of bonhomie as when I came to interview him during the BFI London Film Festival in October, not long before his new film *Sunset Song* had its UK premiere there, you can take it on trust, because Davies is someone I see socially from time to time. Indeed, during the summer, I was ushered into the back seat of a car to meet him outside the BFI building at a time when he was in a rather gloomier state. He was still wrangling over small changes to the cut – the part of the filmmaking process, I feel safe in saying, that Davies enjoys the least. More recently I'd raised a glass to *Sunset Song* with him in Toronto during the festival, so I'd had the full run of his moods from melancholy to ebullience. And one part of the twinkle currently set in his eye was the knowledge that not only had he finally finished his marathon project 15 years after he began the *Sunset Song* screenplay, but that he had also already shot another film, *A Quiet Passion*, a biopic of the reclusive 19th-century American poet Emily Dickinson.

Such a position of plenitude was hard to imagine only a few years ago. Back in 2007, the fact that Davies hadn't been able to finance a film in seven years was the stick that many UK critics, including me, used to beat the UK Film Council with. He was, of course, first accorded that championed-by-critics status because of his run of utterly devastating autobiographical features from the *Terence Davies Trilogy* (1983) through *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) to *The Long Day Closes* (1992). For me, his reputation was further enhanced by his pin-sharp and deeply moving take on Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (2000). It was the sort of literary endeavour that ought to have set the pattern for his future work, a pattern his two new films seem to fulfil; but what finally got him out of the doldrums of neglect by the film industry was his sensitive essay film about growing up in Liverpool, *Of Time and the City* (2008), which screened at Cannes and opened the door to his return to fiction features with *The Deep Blue Sea* (2011).

*Sunset Song*, Davies's adaptation of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's classic Scottish novel, is partly a paean to a landscape and the changing seasons within it, and Davies and his director of photography Michael McDonough have created a lush, fulsome film, shot using 65mm, which is a joy to the eye. The story concerns a farming family living in the north-east of Scotland, consisting of harsh disciplinarian father John Guthrie (Peter Mullan), loyal mother Jean (Daniela Nardini), and their two grown-up children: the scholarly Chris (Agyness Deyn), who gives up her academic studies to work on the land, and her beloved brother Will (Jack Greenlees), who bitterly resents the treatment that's meted out to him by his father and soon leaves. Later on it deals with the love between Chris and local boy Ewan (Kevin Guthrie) as the shadow of World War I creeps closer. It's a tale of brooding terror, bottled-up emotions and stoic patience that finds room for blossoming romance, and burgeoning tragedy.





**Nick James:** How did you discover the book?

**Terence Davies:** I actually discovered it as a serial on BBC1 on a Sunday night [in 1971] and I watched it each week because you couldn't record anything then and had to wait a week for the next one, so I ran out to buy the book. It's quite hard to read because it's in Doric [north-east Scots] dialect. I just loved the serialisation. I was training as a bookkeeper then, so it was just something I wanted to read. Not having gone to university, I wanted to read all the time. Then, years later, when I started to make films, it was always at the back of my mind.

**NJ:** Can you elaborate on the quality of the writing in the original?

**TD:** Like most things, it was about the story. It's epic. At the time I didn't see that, I just saw it as a rich drama. I responded the way you do to something you love, like *Jane Eyre*, the first proper novel I ever read. It's terribly badly written, but it's a great story. I was just interested in the drama and Vivien Heilbron's wonderful performance [as Chris Guthrie]. That's what stayed with me. When I decided I wanted to adapt it I went back to the novel because I couldn't see the BBC version – and I'm glad I couldn't, as it would restrict me. Over six or seven episodes you can do so much more than in a two-hour film. [In film] you have to be so much more ruthless with the text. We worked on it from 2000 until 2003, when we got the final draft, and it went to the UK Film Council who, after six months, said it hadn't got legs.

**NJ:** When you were writing your version, how fully formed was it from scene to scene.

**TD:** It's much more haphazard than that. I write everything shot for shot – and if it needs some music then that goes in... other ideas you write on scraps of paper, and over a year those notes accrete and you have a vague idea of what the structure is. And then I write it out. I always write longhand. Then I have a break and come back to it. And you're reading the novel all the time. You think, "This is weak, how can I make it feel cinematic, how do I show this succinctly without the characters telling it to you?" That's always the interesting bit. The power of cinema, when it's good, is that it catches the fleeting moment, the tiny things that have enormous power.

I wrote the end first – the end is so moving. No matter how many times I read it, I am still in tears, because it's so full of humanity. You get it down for the first draft and you think, "No, this needs a lot more work, here and there. What do I need there?" I only do three drafts and a polish, and that's the shooting script.

**NJ:** This is a chamber drama, so the casting is absolutely crucial. How did you and Peter Mullan get along, because there's a few echoes of the stern father of your autobiographical films.

**TD:** We were doing the casting through [veteran agents] the Hubbards. I knew Peter Mullan had made a very violent film, *Tyrannosaur* [2010], and I said, "I won't watch it." They said, "If we found you a bit that wasn't violent, would you watch it?" And I said, "Yes, but if it is violent, I'll just switch it off." There's a tiny scene when someone goes to put a tie on him and it was just sublime, because it wasn't acting. I said, "Do you think he would even consider it?" And he came in on a Tuesday and I said, "Have you come far?", thinking he'd come from somewhere in London, and he said, "I've come down from Glasgow." And I said, "I would have given it to you over the phone,"

*We went to New Zealand partly for the tax breaks. When we got there, they'd had the worst storms in 50 years, and I thought, 'Terrific, I could have stayed home and got this for free'*

and he said, "I wanted to meet you." He's a lovely man. Very funny. And, like me, a real republican. We got on very well. What he did was bring a lot of warmth to that character. And his voice is very melodic, very caressing. He uses mostly the lower register, which is very rich. When he does turn [nasty], it's even more shocking, because it's not expected.

**NJ:** How did Agyness Deyn impress you?

**TD:** The Hubbards had said, "These are the people we'd like to come in." And someone said, "Agyness Deyn is a model." I have no idea about that kind of popular culture, about who the top model is. Anyway, I came up the stairs and she was outside the door, and she looked about 11 years old. And she did the most wonderful audition.

**NJ:** The novel has a prologue about the history of the land, and Agyness's character Chris is bound up in her love of the land. You had to find some of that landscape in New Zealand – did you hope to find it closer to home?

**TD:** No, we knew we couldn't guarantee good weather in Scotland and we had to have all the seasons. And we went to New Zealand partly because of tax breaks. When we got there, they'd had the worst storms in 50 years, and I thought, "Terrific, I could have stayed home and got this for free." Then the weather broke for three and a half days and it was glorious.

When we eventually did shoot in Scotland, it was very variable. I had to junk a lot of the ending because it was just people moving through grey light. What we've got at the end is much better now because it keeps it domestic and makes it more powerful. We've captured the essence of it without it being literal.

**NJ:** You hadn't used Michael McDonough as your director of photography before.

**TD:** Florian Hoffmeister, who shot *The Deep Blue Sea*, wasn't available, so we saw a lot of cinematographers and this lad came in called Michael and he was Scottish. There was just something about him. What sealed it for me was that he got this little device out. "I made this myself," he said. It really touched my heart.

**NJ:** Do you get involved in the technology of shooting?

**TD:** I don't understand it. That's why I do a lot of tests beforehand. I tend to only use a small number of lenses and I can never remember what they are. I've never understood it – even after three years of film school. When

**JUST ACT NATURAL**  
Terence Davies, on set with Agyness Deyn (below), says he tells all his actors not to 'act', allowing them sufficient latitude in their performances to prioritise what they 'feel'





the subject is in front of the camera, you look down the lens, and that's it. That's about it as far as technique goes.

**NJ: Tell me about the idea of using 65mm. I saw the film in Toronto on the IMAX screen and it was just the most enveloping experience. How was that decision presented to you?**

**TD:** It was an idea Florian had given me: "Do the exteriors on 65mm, and do all the interiors digital." And that will be the last time that camera will ever be used and those lenses, because no one is going to make film anymore – digital has taken over. They transformed it down to 4K on the digital and it still looks pretty good. When we were shooting I would have said it was 50/50 between film and digital. Now digital is much more responsive to light than film.

**NJ: We haven't really talked about the Scottishness of *Sunset Song*. What was your approach to that?**

**TD:** You have to make it understandable. Americans were saying they'd never be able to understand it and it'll have to have subtitles. Well, I'm not going to put subtitles on it. They either understand it or they don't. But we had to do something, because there was a man in one scene who it was impossible to understand – and I wrote the dialogue! So make it a general Scottish accent. And if you use a lot of the poetry of the interior monologue it's very poetic and very beautiful. Gibbon wrote that in received English. I created about 10 per cent of the dialogue. I've got a good imitative ear.

**NJ: Do you mean the dialogue or the interior monologue?**

**TD:** Both. When we finished *The House of Mirth*, we showed it to the Edith Wharton Society and they said they couldn't tell what was her and what was me. That was a great compliment. Because I did take a lot of trouble over that and over this. It's easy to be imitative if you're only doing 10 per cent.

**NJ: Were there films from the past in the back of your mind that had some of the quality of this story at all?**

**TD:** Oh yes. *The Night of the Hunter* [1955]. And for some of the exteriors, parts of *The Big Country* [1958] are good. And indeed *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* [1954].

**NJ: You're very particular about the music you bring in.**

**TD:** It's important. When the music is there to tell you something, it shouldn't be there. It should underline and imply something. There's only one exception to that and that's Bernard Herrmann's score to *Psycho* [1960]. You've got to have that tension at the beginning and he provides it. But everywhere else it should just nudge you towards something, deepen what you've just seen. When I was 18 and I started to listen to classical music properly, there used to be a man called Alan Keith on the Home Service as it was called then, called *Your Hundred Best Tunes* and it was all popular classics like 'The Jewels of the Madonna' and he played 'All in the April Evening' by the Glasgow Phoenix Choir, which was an amateur choir started by a Glaswegian undertaker. I never forgot it. And when I was writing I thought, "That's got to go in."

**NJ: Did Agnieszka need any coaxing to sing?**

**TD:** It was the day before we were doing her wedding. A few of us were in this house, it was bitterly cold and we suddenly heard this voice singing. I said, "I'm sure that's Agnieszka," and we went through to where she was and I asked, "Was that you?" and she said, "Yes," and I said, "Well, you've got to sing it now." A lovely voice, very gentle and light. No coaching at all. I say to the actors in every film, "I don't want you to act, but I'll be there for



**SCENE FROM A MARRIAGE**  
Newly weds Chris (Agnieszka Deyn) and local farmer Ewan, played by Kevin Guthrie (top); and Chris's authoritarian father John Guthrie, played by Peter Mullan (above)

you. If you do something that's different than I think is best, stay with it." That way you give them the freedom to do what they feel. And it's much, much more powerful if they don't 'act'. But they've got to have the architecture of the piece, and technique has to come in there, but it just has to be felt.

**NJ: What was the thorniest thing to deal with?**

**TD:** The constant pressure of not having enough money. Because we all took a risk. That was a constant strain, of having to drop scenes or rewrite them. I'll never do that again. It was very unpleasant, but necessary. There was also the physical discomfort of being in Scotland in the cold and the mud.

I had to have four Luxembourg actors [to meet funding stipulations] and the cast we had was all Irish. This lad came in who looked exactly like Toulouse-Lautrec. And I said, "The problem is he's supposed to be Scottish," and he said, "Well, my accent isn't very good," and I said, "I got that." They said, "Well, you've got to have one more actor from Luxembourg that has a line." The only person left was this lovely gentleman called Hercule, who was playing the undertaker, and I suggested he could say, "That's all folks!" and that went down like a lead balloon. ☺

**i** **Sunset Song is released on 4 December and is reviewed on page 72**





# FIGHT THE POWER

*In a series of taut political dramas and probing, combative documentaries over the past 30 years the Haitian director Raoul Peck has taken aim at everything from the class system and the iniquities of capitalism to the brutal injustices of history and the bureaucratic failures of international aid*

**By Ashley Clark**

*"Oh, don't get me started on objectivity. There is no such thing. Nobody is objective; we all have an agenda, whether consciously or unconsciously. It is all about the storytelling. Unfortunately, places like Haiti and an overall two-thirds of the world don't have access to their own storytelling. We don't own our own stories, we don't tell our own stories. See, I am now an old filmmaker so I have no problem to be totally subjective. I have so much catch-up to do in terms of telling my own story, so the only efficient way to do it is to tell it how I feel it." Raoul Peck, 2013*

**Raoul Peck is one of Haiti's few** prominent directors, and one of fewer still among them whose films have been exported to the rest of the world. His body of work over the last three decades encompasses fiction and documentary, and primarily explores class struggle, the exercise of power over developing societies by developed nations, and the impact of political decision-making upon deprived people. A major retrospective at BFI Southbank in December offers London audiences the rare chance to become acquainted with his remarkable work, which deserves far wider recognition. BFI curator David Somerset describes his output as "probing,"





politically resonant and universally relevant.” The programme’s pointed title, ‘Stolen Images’, chosen by Peck, is also the name of a volume of his collected screenplays – it refers to the long-standing deficit of complex representations of African diasporic life. The presence of these images in Peck’s films constitutes a deft counterstrike against mainstream cinematic hegemony.

In a similar vein to Ethiopian director Haile Gerima (profiled on page 60), Peck is a political filmmaker whose tonally diverse films reveal a clear aesthetic imagination – that is to say he avoids the pitfalls of worthiness often associated with such work.

Peck was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1953, four years before the dictator François ‘Papa Doc’ Duvalier came to power there. His family left in 1961 for a newly independent Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where they connected with other educated Haitian exiles who’d arrived to replace the Belgian professionals who had fled as the country began the process of decolonisation. Peck’s father, an agronomist, worked for the United Nations, while his mother, Giselle, was an aide to several mayors in the capital Kinshasa. Peck benefited from this privileged existence, which afforded him the opportunity to study in the US and France. He also took courses in industrial engineering and economics in Germany before beginning a film career, eventually receiving an MFA in Film at the German Film and Television Academy.

His feature debut, the atmospheric *Haitian Corner*, arrived in 1987. It follows a man named Joseph, who flees the dictatorial Haitian regime after seven gruelling years in prison. He moves to Brooklyn, where he is surrounded by Haitian exiles. One day, while strolling the city streets, he spots a man whom he recognises as one of his former torturers. He is thereby plunged back into the world he was trying to forget, and succumbs to the all-too-human thirst for revenge. This gripping, rough-hewn drama – a clear influence on Andrew Dosunmu’s hypnotic immigrant tale *Restless City* (2011) – was the first sign of Peck’s fascination with how the ghosts of national history have the power to haunt across borders.

Shortly after his debut, Peck attempted to launch a fiction project around the life of Patrice Lumumba, who became the first prime minister of DRC in 1960 at the age of 34, but who lasted mere months in office before being assassinated. Already facing an uphill battle in trying to build a major film around a black revolutionary hero, Peck was further stymied by its potential funders’ suggestions that the film should include a white character to help it “cross over” (like Kevin Kline’s journalist in Richard Attenborough’s 1987 film *Cry Freedom*, about the murdered South African activist Steve Biko). Instead, Peck crafted an esoteric, stylised documentary (*Lumumba: Death of a Prophet*, 1990) using home movies, photographs, old newsreels and contemporary interviews with Belgian journalists and Lumumba’s daughter. It is both a personal reflection on the man’s 12-month rise and fall, and a moving memorial to a complex, charismatic figure.

Peck’s next film, *Man by the Shore* (1993), was his first period drama, and another stark reckoning with the ghosts of history and the grim lure of revenge. It’s the story of a woman haunted by nightmares about a mysterious man, and the devastating events of her childhood. Told mainly in flashback and set in the 1960s, we discover more about the trauma experienced by the girl as an eight-year-old, as her parents are forced to flee Papa Doc’s Haiti without her and her two sisters. It is a distinctly Haitian tale in locale and custom, yet by sensitively and rigorously conveying the impact of oppression on one



**EXPANDING HORIZONS**  
Raoul Peck’s films include *Lumumba* (2000), starring Eriq Ebouaney (opposite) as the leader of the newly independent Democratic Republic of Congo in 1960, and (from top) *Man by the Shore* (1993), *Sometimes in April* (2005) and *Fatal Assistance* (2013)

family, Peck ensures that his film is ultimately analogous to the struggle for survival under any oppressive regime, be it Hitler’s Germany, Idi Amin’s Uganda or Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. *Man by the Shore* also has the dual distinction of being the first film from the Caribbean to compete for the Palme d’Or at Cannes, and the first Haitian movie ever to be released in US cinemas.

A string of shorts, television projects and documentaries followed, as did a radical career change. In 1996, Peck was appointed Haiti’s minister for culture in the cabinet of Prime Minister Rosny Smarth. His decision to enter politics was part of a collective effort among a group of like-minded individuals who wished to institute much needed reforms in the country. However, his tenure didn’t last long; he resigned, alongside Smarth, after 18 months, in protest at what he saw as an anti-democratic takeover by former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Peck described his tenure as a “harsh, ruthless political struggle” in his 1998 book *Monsieur le Ministre... Jusqu’au bout de la patience*. (James R. Morrell, former research director of the Center for International Policy, described the book as “an invaluable inside look, available



nowhere else, at the phenomenon of divided government that is further immiserating the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.”)

That difficult political experience motivated Peck to return to the subject of the assassinated leader of the DRC, and now, with sufficient clout, he was able to make the storming biopic *Lumumba* (2000). Due to political unrest in the DRC at the time of filming, it was shot in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and it unfolds with a verve and crackle redolent of Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X* (1992). *Lumumba* showcases Peck at his most accessible, blending political acuity with narrative clarity to create stirring entertainment. It also benefits greatly from the muscular title performance by Eriq Ebouaney, and a sly, vicious turn from Claire Denis regular Alex Descas as Joseph Mobutu, the man who superseded him.

*Lumumba* ushered in a rich and diverse decade for Peck. His 2001 essay film *Profit & Nothing But! Or Impolite Thoughts on the Class Struggle*, lives up to its provocative title. Absent is any Michael Moore-style jiggery-pokery; instead, the film interweaves the commentary of various economists and thinkers with the director’s personal reflections to argue that capitalism is a system engineered to serve only the richest citizens of the richest nations, with a vast, inherent contradiction between its self-proclaimed triumph and the harsh reality of life in countries like Haiti. Back in the realm of fiction, Peck broached the subject of the Rwandan genocide in *Sometimes in April* (2005), a moving made-for-TV film about a Hutu soldier (Idris Elba, in a strong early role) who tries to get his Tutsi wife and family to safety during the Rwandan genocide. Peck held the world premiere of the film in a huge stadium in the Rwandan capital of Kigali in front of an audience of thousands, many of whom had lost relatives during the massacre. “I could only imagine making this film if the Rwandans were the first to see it,” he told the *Guardian*’s Geoffrey Macnab, “Whatever the critics say doesn’t matter to me. The only people whose judgement I would accept are the Rwandan people.” Peck’s starkly satirical *Moloch Tropical* (2009), about the final days in

*‘Lumumba’ showcases Peck at his most accessible, blending political acuity with narrative clarity to create genuinely stirring entertainment*


**CLASS ACT**  
Raoul Peck (below) is currently making *The Young Karl Marx*, which explores the friendship between Marx and Friedrich Engels during the period of their collaboration on *The Communist Manifesto*



office of a fictional despotic Haitian president, rounded out his filmmaking decade in fine style.

While *Moloch Tropical* was screening at festivals internationally, in January 2010, a massive earthquake struck Haiti, killing more than 160,000 and displacing close to 1.5 million people. After the well-publicised recovery mission had faded from view, Peck set out to discover the true accomplishments of the supposed aid work. The result was his documentary *Fatal Assistance* (2013), a calm yet furious polemic which targets the supposedly well-meaning NGOs, celebrities and aid organisations who clamoured to help Haiti, but ultimately created an epic bureaucratic shambles. In an intriguing formal flourish, he layers the film’s images (mostly footage of busybody activists and celebrities contrasted with stark, widescreen portraits of the distressed landscape) with two voiceovers: one, female, offers the regretful testimony of a fictional aid worker; the other, male, an omniscient chronicler of woe. It imbues the film with a yearning, otherworldly quality lacking in many other such tales of national and institutional malaise.

The cataclysmic effects of the disaster reverberate in Peck’s most recent feature, *Murder in Pacot* (2014), an ingenious riff on Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Theorem* (1968), set in ravaged, post-earthquake Port-au-Prince in 2010. Beautifully shot in inky blues and blacks by Eric Guichard, it focuses on the increasingly fraught interplay between four closely linked individuals: a wealthy black Haitian couple who represent the country’s decadent bourgeoisie; a young, white, self-righteous Frenchman working for a foreign aid organisation (he might as well have walked straight in from *Fatal Assistance*); and a local teenage escort-turned-seductress. Confined to one single location – a partially wrecked, once-lavish house under whose rubble may lie the corpse of the couple’s adopted stepson – it’s claustrophobic, tense and scalpel sharp on the country’s entrenched class divisions.

*Murder in Pacot* sadly failed to find a wide release in European territories, perhaps because its slow-burn nature occasionally feels lugubrious – a potential turn-off, added to its acridly cynical tone. However, he has plenty of intriguing projects on the horizon. He has been working for nearly a decade on a documentary about the African-American novelist, essayist and anti-racist activist James Baldwin, whom he cites as a personal hero. It is being made with the full cooperation of the Baldwin estate, and will reportedly toy with the speculative idea that Baldwin completed a triple biography – which he had begun towards the end of his life – about activists Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr, whose lives ended in assassinations. Peck told journalist Pooja Bhatia: “The starting point of the film is to say – yes, he wrote it; he just didn’t bind it together. But if you go through his work, the film is there.” Peck has also been filming, in France and Belgium, *The Young Karl Marx*, a period drama about the friendship between Marx and Friedrich Engels, and their completion of *The Communist Manifesto*, which spawned the rhetorical tools for emancipating oppressed and colonised masses around the world. In this respect, Peck’s Marx film can be seen as an origin story for his own cinema and its overarching concerns – it is a tantalising prospect. 

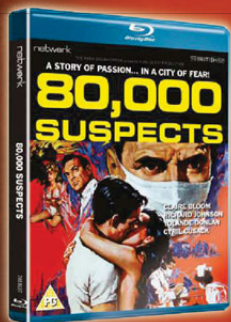
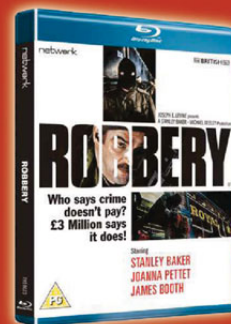
 **The ‘Stolen Images’ season is playing at BFI Southbank, London, throughout December**

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES (C)



network

# THE BEST OF THE BRITISH FILM IN 2015



Order now from  
[networkonair.com](http://networkonair.com)

#TheBritishFilm

/TheBritishFilm



## Underground

SPECIAL EDITION DVD & BLU-RAY VERSIONS

Contains the celebrated feature film,  
along with the 6-part TV version,  
*Once Upon a Time There Was a Country*

'A tour de-force...Inventive, ebullient'  
**The Observer**

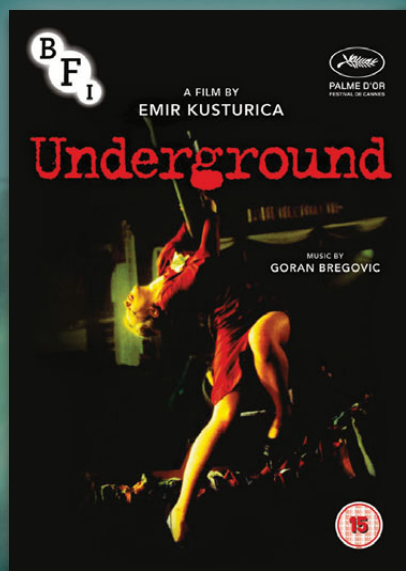
'A steamroller circus that leaves  
the viewer dazed and exhausted,  
but mightily impressed'

**Variety**



PALME D'OR  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

Palme d'Or 1995 Cannes Film Festival



ORDER YOUR COPY NOW





# QUEEN

*Nora Ephron made films that combined caustic wit with happy endings – and helped define the modern*

# OF


*romantic comedy. Often overlooked during her lifetime, she forged an attitude of confessional intimacy*

# HEARTS

*that anticipated our online culture of disclosure and influenced a generation of female comics*

**By Hannah McGill**

**It's little wonder that** the sweet-and-sour flavours of the screwball romance – in which a couple must, at the commencement of the narrative, be active impediments to one another's contentment or at the very least appear to be wholly unavailable to one another, only to find that their differences in fact render them an ideal match – appealed to Nora Ephron. The fame of this journalist, novelist, screenwriter and director fed on contradiction, and on a lucky combination of softness and sharps. That

she made canonical mainstream romantic comedies but retained credibility as an edgy satirist and social commentator points to a management of words and ideas that was at once inclusive and rebellious – and that has turned her into the favoured reference point for comedy's current household names. "I kept a copy of Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* next to me as a reminder of how to be funny and truthful," writes Amy Poehler in the introduction to her memoir *Yes Please* (adding, 

PHOTOGRAPH BY © RUVEN AFANADOR/CORBIS OUTLINE









“all I ended up doing was ignoring my writing and rereading *Heartburn*”). Lena Dunham dedicated her essay collection *Not That Kind of Girl* to Ephron, and eulogised her in the *New Yorker* when she died in 2012. Mindy Kaling calls her a “role model”; Tina Fey and Amy Schumer are habitually named as her inheritors. Ephron’s unfinished script for a film adaptation of the 2008 ITV miniseries *Lost in Austen* will be completed by *Portlandia* creator and *Sleater-Kinney* member Carrie Brownstein.

Although she may not be remembered as she once said she wished to be – “as the greatest nightclub singer ever” – Ephron might take solace in the frenzy of appreciation that followed her death. The reappearance of *When Harry Met Sally...* (1989) in UK cinemas as part of the BFI’s ‘LOVE’ season is just one manifestation. A documentary portrait, *Everything Is Copy*, directed by her son Jacob Bernstein, debuted at the 2015 New York Film Festival and is set to screen on HBO in spring. A new Amazon series, *Good Girls Revolt*, will feature the young Ephron as a character, played by Grace Gummer, daughter of her frequent collaborator Meryl Streep.

It isn’t only the success of *When Harry Met Sally...*, *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993) and *You’ve Got Mail* (1998) that will have contributed to the likes of Dunham, Poehler

**WORKING GIRL**  
Ephron’s career included such huge hits as *Sleepless in Seattle* (above) and *When Harry Met Sally...* (opposite), occasional flops such as *Mixed Nuts* (below right), and the autobiographical *Heartless* (below left)

and Fey feeling the influence of Ephron through their formative years. Her influence got around, touching journalism, literature and television as well as cinema. It was after the success of *When Harry Met Sally...* (which was not wholly expected; the film opened against the summer blockbusters *Batman*, *Ghostbusters II*, *Licence to Kill* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, and like many films not pitched squarely at teenage boys, was not seen as much of a commercial prospect) that the American sitcom developed its fascination with the will-they-won’t-they male-female friendship. *Friends* and its subsequent imitators – *How I Met Your Mother*, *Happy Endings*, *The Big Bang Theory* – all echo Ephron’s comedies, not only in their depiction of fitfully platonic partnership, but in their middle-class urban milieus and their preoccupation with the support structures and social neuroses of mildly dysfunctional people. While *Seinfeld* would never have included anything so soppy as the last-act declaration of love in *When Harry Met Sally...*, Ephron’s caustic wit and attention to minutiae was still in its DNA. And *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City* clearly channelled Ephron’s kind of romcom, even as they set it up as an unattainable romantic ideal. Hell, Ephron herself knew it was an unattainable romantic ideal. She once noted that when people confided to her that they were in situations comparable to the plot of *When Harry Met Sally...*, “I want to say to them, it’s probably not gonna work!”

Why the positive consensus? During her lifetime, after all, Ephron’s reputation had its ups and downs. The great fame she built over the 1960s and 1970s as a journalist, essayist and television personality brought with it the gossip and envy that great fame tends to bring; and marriage in 1976 to the Watergate superhero Carl Bernstein brought more. A long-form piece of snippiness from a 1983 issue of *New York Magazine* cites some friendly accounts of her, but reports that “when her name comes up in conversation, as it often does in New York literary circles, you are much more likely to hear it from someone who has been the target of one of her barbs... or someone who has been cut dead by her in the presence of her more celebrated friends, or someone who has been suddenly dropped by her after what seemed like years of friendship... As one of them once put it, ‘I want to see her crawl over broken glass.’”

The publication of her novel *Heartburn*, a very thinly veiled portrait of her separation from Bernstein in the



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (OPPOSITE PAGE) NYCC (2)



wake of his infidelity, gave the world a classic of comic fiction and a model for the genre now known as chick-lit. But many thought it indiscreet and self-serving of her to make the private so public. And her career as a screenwriter and director, though studded with good, great and hugely influential works, also features films widely regarded as duds, such as the messy Christmas ensemble *Mixed Nuts* (1994), the gooey angel fantasy *Michael* (1996) and the reviled *Bewitched* (2005). “Even within a single movie,” wrote Matt Weinstock in the *Paris Review* soon after her death, “there are moments of rapturous sublimity and moments you feel like crossing the street to avoid.”

It may be that her inconsistency, as both a creative force and a hit-maker, is part of the reason Ephron's stock is so high at present. Prominent in the current conversation about the film industry's inadequate representation of female workers has been what Rebecca Keegan recently called in the *LA Times* the “*Ishtar* effect”: the phenomenon, named after Elaine May's box-office disaster, whereby male directors survive flop after flop, but a high-stakes failure from a female director is an instant threat to her livelihood. Whether through the quality of her best work, or through sheerchutzpah, Ephron earned the right to fail, and that makes her an interesting anomaly among female directors. Not that she was interested in being grouped thus. Her feminism was of a brusque, take-charge kind that eschewed special pleading. “I can't stand people complaining,” she told Ariel Levy in the *New Yorker* in 2009. “So it's not a conversation that interests me, do you know? Those endless women-in-film panels. It's like, just do it! Just *do it*.”

## INSIDE OUT

This unfashionable aversion to identity politics aside, the gaze that Ephron turned on relationships (the theme that dominated her *oeuvre*, though not, she claimed, by design: she once said her closet was “full of political scripts” and indeed the first theatrical feature she wrote was the nuclear whistleblower drama *Silkwood* in 1983) is extraordinarily compatible with current sensibilities. As a chronicler of her own life, she displayed an irreverent, confessional style and a whimsical eye for life's small absurdities that precisely anticipated the online cult of self-revelation. As a celebrity, she was an insider-outsider, unabashedly enjoying her place in America's intellectual and show-business glitterati even as she mocked the eccentricities and hypocrisies of those institutions in her writing. And in all that she wrote and made, she balanced harshness and hope, ensuring that clever people didn't have to feel compromised by reading her, and dumb people didn't find her too artily nihilistic. Her smart observations cosseted her audiences into feeling special – part of the sharp set, allowed in on the bitchy joke – and yet she absolutely insisted upon happy endings. Look at *Heartburn*, filmed in 1986 by Mike Nichols with Streep in the Ephron role and Jack Nicholson as Bernstein. One of the most unsparing *romans à clef* in the history of American letters, it was derided by one columnist as “indecent exploitation” and “child abuse” for what it might do to the Bernstein children, one of whom was *in utero* at the time of his father's affair. Yet it's also



warm, soothing, redemptive and includes instructions for the perfect mashed potatoes.

Unsurprisingly Ephron's movie characters mimicked her spiky/cute style, and sometimes lifted lines from her personal writing wholesale. (Well, if you come up with weirdly resonant little quips like “Pesto is the quiche of the 80s” or “Thin. Pretty. Big tits. Your basic nightmare”, you may as well reuse them more than once.) On the whole, however, her film work waxes considerably soppy than the writing she left on the page. Lines like *When Harry Met Sally's* “I came here tonight because when you realise you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible” allowed that film to mop up viewers for whom Woody Allen's worldview remained a tad too cynical. In Meg Ryan, meanwhile, Ephron found an onscreen avatar able to embody jaded urban

*Ephron balanced harshness and hope, ensuring clever people didn't have to feel compromised, and dumb people didn't find her too artily nihilistic*





neurosis and all-American, button-nosed adorability at the same time. Her most successful films as a director, *Sleepless in Seattle* and *You've Got Mail*, would also utilise Ryan – and land the actress with a ditzzy-cute persona she would struggle to shed.

If audiences embraced these films, critics kept Ephron at arm's length, particularly when she directed. In the context of her current status as a legend in the making, it's rather shocking to scan back over the opprobrium she attracted at the height of her box-office powers. Even positive reviews favoured the tack that Ephron somehow got you against your better judgement, critics straining to assure the reader that while she might warm the odd cockle, it wasn't to be imagined that she was actually good. "It's a stunt," wrote Vincent Canby of *Sleepless in Seattle* in the *New York Times*, "but a stunt that works far more effectively than anybody in his right mind has reason to expect." The right-minded would apply still less generosity to their treatment of *You've Got Mail* – and these are Ephron's classics, her acclaimed films.

Even Ephron's strongest defenders might concede that appreciation of her films must co-exist with an awareness that they shut out many of life's inconveniences, make giant leaps of emotional logic and sometimes say things about men and women that seem a bit patronising to one or the other constituency. The idea that men are brainlessly oversexed and women ditzzy, high-maintenance and marriage-crazed drives *When Harry Met Sally...* just as much as the pair's delightful banter does; and even Ephron's most ostensibly revealing work in essay and memoir has a certain sparkly evasiveness about it.

Yet the dismissal of her as a meaningful creator skips something astute and prescient in her *oeuvre*, which is illuminated in the way in which it continues to speak to fans, in particular female ones. It's not only that she gave guilty pleasure a patina of cleverness. Her female characters were neither glossily idealised 'strong women', nor flamboyantly needy messes. She had a particular skill for portraying two things frequently denied to women on screen: friendships and food. And in the phone calls of *When Harry Met Sally...*, the radio chat and letters of *Sleepless in Seattle*, the emails of *You've Got Mail* and the food bloggery of *Julie & Julia* (2009), she persistently found interesting ways to extend communication on screen – to scrape away the niceties of face-to-face dialogue in order to take us closer to her characters' realities.

While few would credit her with a flawless CV, the impulse to denigrate Ephron for triviality or cutesiness must be scrutinised for tendencies identified by Emily Nussbaum in a recent *New Yorker* piece about the scorn



*Ephron's trademarks – introspection cut with self-deprecation, judicious use of schmaltz – seem to have set a blueprint for how to be a woman who entertains today*

now heaped on the once-respected *Sex and the City*: "It's a classic misunderstanding, I think, stemming from an unexamined hierarchy: the assumption that anything stylized (or formulaic, or pleasurable, or funny, or feminine, or explicit about sex rather than about violence, or made collaboratively) must be inferior." One might judge that this "misunderstanding" (a generous way of putting it) has reached its most extreme expression with the extraordinary level of criticism meted out to Lena Dunham for the self-exposure her work features.

Dunham has taken the Ephron style to much more exposing and uncomfortable places than Ephron ever did. But if the synthetic sweetness of her films appears unhip, Ephron's other trademarks – introspection cut with self-deprecation; a merciless eye for the foibles of others; judicious deployment of schmaltz – seem to have set a precise blueprint for how to be a woman who entertains today. For her famous acolytes, an Ephron name-check communicates something specific. It says: I am outspoken and maybe a bit political, but I still have the common touch. I am clever, but not too clever to make millions. Sad things may have happened to me, but I can make them funny. I am weird – but I'm *marketably* weird.

Perhaps, indeed, it's the strobe-light effect of Ephron's insights – now you see me, now you don't; now I capture a profundity, now I coast on cliché – that makes her such a totem for female creators working in the glare of intrusive and intensely critical media. Poehler learned from her study of *Heartburn* not how to tell all, but how not to: her own post-divorce memoir reveals precisely nothing about her divorce. Fey – the most oft-anointed "new Nora" – has become America's sweetheart without either being very sweet or offering up her heart. In a showbiz milieu that likes women to crack, their admired and maligned predecessor controlled the story about herself, offering up exactly as much as she wanted to. After flop or hit film, good or bad review, miserable break-up or devastating diagnosis, composure was regained and a quip readied. Little wonder Ephron's fans and followers remain hungry for some of what she was having. ☺



***When Harry Met Sally...* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 11 December, as part of the BFI's nationwide 'LOVE' season. The BFI 'LOVE' Compendium is available now, priced £16.99**

#### FRESH INGREDIENTS

In the emails of *You've Got Mail* (above) and the food bloggery of *Julie & Julia* (right), Nora Ephron repeatedly found interesting ways to extend forms of communication on screen







THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound

## CHRISTMAS GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Order by 9 December to make 2016 the year of film!

### DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION ONLY £30

12 months' access to two years of back issues.

Available on PC/Mac, iPad, Android devices + Kindle Fire.

### PRINT SUBSCRIPTION £45 (UK), £68 (RoW)

12 months – saving £9 on the cover price.

Includes FREE digital edition.

### COMPLETE ARCHIVE ACCESS £50 – £88

An additional £20 PA gets you access to the complete 80+ year digital archive of Sight & Sound and the Monthly Film Bulletin (available on desktop only).



**PLUS** as an extra Christmas treat we're giving away a copy of cult classic *Les Yeux Sans Visage* with every print subscription.\*

### HOW TO ORDER

For more details and to order visit [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe) or call +44 (0)20 8955 7070 quoting 'Christmas Gift Subscription'

Offer ends 9 December 2015. All print subscriptions will commence with the February 2016 issue arriving by 6 January. Access to the digital edition will be immediately available. Recipients will be notified of their gift subscription by email before Christmas. DVDs should arrive with purchaser before Christmas. \*DVD offer available to UK subscribers only.

### AVAILABLE ON





# FILMS OF THE YEAR

The results of our poll of the best films of 2015, voted for by 168 critics, has highlighted a heartening stylistic variety in a year marked by strong female characters, but the precarious state of foreign-language arthouse titles at the box office continues to be a cause for concern

By Nick James

This round-up must begin with a brief explanation for our UK readers. It's the first time our chosen film of the year – Hou Hsiao-Hsien's magnificent *The Assassin*, starring the impeccable Shu Qi – is one that has yet to be released in the UK, though it did play at the BFI London Film Festival and you'll only have to wait until the end of January to see it. Our critics, of course, view films well in advance all over the international film festival world, and it's pleasing that such a gorgeous work of revenge, magic and delicate restraint – a work of martial arts cinema only in the loosest sense – should win out with them. We hope you enjoy it as so many of us did.

For myself, I had been under the general impression that 2015 had been a middling, even disappointing year

for cinema. But looking down the list, and seeing such a variety of approaches in the top ten is heartening, especially as it's been a tough year in the marketplace for all kinds of films. Todd Haynes's swooning, subtle lesbian melodrama *Carol* has no peers in terms of craft and guile, so it's no surprise to see it in one of the top spots. On the other hand, finding George Miller's mega-chase-movie *Mad Max: Fury Road* in third place might seem a surprise. I would argue, however, that many critics have waited a long while for such a sharp, vivid and imaginative blockbuster and, for me, this one has destroyed the already ragged concept of 'vulgar auteurism'; what the inventive marshalling of cinema's full resources by a genius looks like is *Mad Max: Fury Road*, not anything by Michael Bay.

The three-part, multi-strand *Arabian Nights* by the Portuguese wonder Miguel Gomes deserves its fourth position for its singular courage in trying to diagnose the malaises of western Europe through parable and paradox. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendour* is such a quiet and unassuming experience it took me two screenings to fully appreciate, but it is a major work of understated sophisticated humour. I haven't seen *No Home Movie* yet, but the loss this year of Chantal Akerman should be a cause of grief to anyone who loves cinema (and it's possible that even those idiots who booed her film at the press screening in Locarno think they love cinema).

At number seven we come to a wonderfully taut and perceptive British film, Andrew Haigh's *45 Years*, which is happily free of the clichés that have collected around British social realism of late. The fact that *45 Years*, which first screened at the Berlin Film Festival, is one of only a few of our critics' films of the year that didn't premiere at Cannes gives me cause to consider how dominant the latter festival is in the critical imagination. To underline the point, the next two titles in our list – László Nemes's *Son of Saul* and Asif Kapadia's *Amy* – were also Cannes premieres. It makes me wonder if such terrific Ber-

*It's pleasing that such a gorgeous work of revenge, magic and delicate restraint as Hou Hsiao-Hsien's 'The Assassin' should win out with our critics*

## TOP 20 FILMS OF 2015


- 1 **The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien
- 2 **Carol** Todd Haynes
- 3 **Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller
- 4 **Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes
- 5 **Cemetery of Splendour** Apichatpong Weerasethakul
- 6 **No Home Movie** Chantal Akerman
- 7 **45 Years** Andrew Haigh
- 8 **Son of Saul** László Nemes
- 9 **Amy** Asif Kapadia
- 10 **Inherent Vice** Paul Thomas Anderson
- 11 **Anomalisa** Duke Johnson & Charlie Kaufman
- = **It Follows** David Robert Mitchell
- 13 **Phoenix** Christian Petzold
- 14 **Girlhood** Céline Sciamma
- = **Hard to Be a God** Aleksei German
- = **Inside Out** Pete Docter
- = **Tangerine** Sean Baker
- = **Taxi Tehran** Jafar Panahi
- 19 **Horse Money** Pedro Costa
- = **The Look of Silence** Joshua Oppenheimer









 *Aferim!* and Sebastian Schipper's *Victoria* might have figured here if Cannes didn't have such a powerful influence, but their time may yet come when they're released, so we'll wait and see. One thing's for certain: the stock of the once mighty Terrence Malick has fallen dramatically. His rather weak *Knight of Cups*, which premiered in Berlin, received only two votes and there's little sign of a UK release on the horizon.

But to return to the list, many people might have expected the coruscating *Son of Saul*, in eighth place, to occupy the top spot, so brilliant is its conception of how to film the unfilmable reality of Auschwitz. That it didn't is possibly down to the continuing reservations many feel as to the moral validity of any depiction of that subject. To take a more personal film, another emotionally raw experience, the docu-biopic *Amy* could also have been higher up. Yet to find such a powerful and popular film in ninth position is another indication that this year has borne richer fruit than one casually might think. And indeed, for David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* to reach number 11 shows that inventive genre cinema has also made its mark as rarely before.


Another more welcome aspect that distinguishes our top ten is that seven of the films centre on striking female characters. To Shu Qi, whom I've mentioned, we can add Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara in *Carol*, Charlize Theron in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Jenjira Pongpas Widner in *Cemetery of Splendour*, Chantal Akerman's mother Natalia (and Chantal herself) in *No Home Movie*, Charlotte Rampling in *45 Years* and Amy Winehouse in *Amy*. This is surely a first and I hope it's more than just a reflection of our push this year to increase the number of female writers in the magazine, and consequently the number of women who took part in this poll, though if that's the case, it is of course welcome.

One area where Cannes cannot be said to dominate thinking is documentary – although our second-highest placed doc *Amy* did premiere there in a midnight-movie slot. *No Home Movie*, our first placed nonfiction film, had

a Locarno debut as mentioned and *The Look of Silence* (=19th) debuted at Venice in 2014 (I voted for it in last year's poll). Documentary is, in any case, perhaps the most extreme victim of the plenitude of releases and its sister phenomenon, the absence of critical consensus. If you think back just a few years, it was noticeably rare for a documentary to receive a theatrical release; now, there are often more than one a week in cinemas.

At the same time, the boom in online film writing and reviewing has encouraged critics to strive to distinguish themselves by asserting how singular their taste is. To be a critic who agrees with the majority is to risk a reputation for blandness. This, in effect, operates as a kind of critical decadence that could substantially affect polls like this one. Of course, the fact that critics have a much wider choice of titles to choose from than ever before leads in any case to a more tentative idea of what really is the best.

But, as problems go, critical decadence pales into insignificance next to the more crucial matter of how we can get audiences to see the real gems of world cinema. Regular followers of Charles Gant's column 'The Numbers' will be all too aware how precarious the situation looks for the kind of intelligent foreign-language cinema that in the past has been *Sight & Sound's* bread and butter, let alone the quirky one-offs that used to blindside everyone with their unexpected audience appeal.

However, the films listed here demonstrate by their very richness that this is not a time for lamentation or nostalgia. Dig deep into the full poll results, which can be found at [bfi.org.uk/best-films-2015](http://bfi.org.uk/best-films-2015), and you will discover a wealth of wonderful films, some of which have only two or three votes to their name. Of these, I would mention Arnaud Desplechin's memoir of young love *My Golden Days* (=21), Guy Maddin's splurge of urges *The Forbidden Room* (=21; see feature on page 28), Marielle Heller's excellent and risky *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (=26), and Terence Davies's refulgent *Sunset Song* (=26; see feature on page 32), which I expect to figure more strongly next year. And that's just scratching the surface. 

*The films listed demonstrate by their richness that this is not a time for lamentation or nostalgia. Dig deep into the poll results and you will discover a wealth of wonderful films*

#### ROLE MODELS

Charlize Theron's Imperator Furiosa in George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* (above left) and Charlotte Rampling's Kate Mercer in *45 Years* (above right) were among a gratifyingly large number of striking female roles in this year's top films



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

**Please note:** below are 50 critics' lists of their top films of 2015, out of a total of 168 responses on which the poll on page 46 is based. The remaining lists and highlights are online at [bfi.org.uk/best-films-2015](http://bfi.org.uk/best-films-2015)

## GEOFF ANDREW

Senior film programmer, BFI Southbank

**Aferim!** Radu Jude

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**The Measure of a Man** Stéphane Brizé

**Mia Madre** Nanni Moretti

**45 Years** Andrew Haigh

● I was sorry not to have space to include other gems, such as *Body*, *The Club*, *Court*, *Jia Zhangke: A Guy from Fenyang*, *One Floor Below*, *The Pearl Button* and *Taxi Tehran*, but five is never enough, even if one only includes new films.

Two of my most enjoyable cinema experiences of the year were the presentation – by Thierry Frémaux and Bertrand Tavernier in Cannes – of around 100 newly restored films by the Lumières; and a London Film Festival screening of four restored/rediscovered Laurel and Hardy comedies which had the entire audience in stitches.

Was it a great year? Maybe not, but as always there was plenty to enjoy. *Aferim!* and *The Assassin* stood out as movies which managed to do things I felt I'd never really seen before, while *45 Years* was quite simply one of the very finest British films of recent years.

## MICHAEL ATKINSON

Critic, US

**The Forbidden Room** Guy Maddin

**The Tribe** Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy

**Out 1** Jacques Rivette

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**About Elly** Asghar Farhadi

● The best of the year seen in the US was the usual if unpredictably volatile cocktail of Asian ellipses, moviehouse-geek projector-beam epiphanies, resurrected New Wave monsters and post-Soviet gimlet gaze – but let us all toast a bubbling, sulphurous nitrate daiquiri to the thousand eyes of the abominable Dr Maddin, whose newest eruption isn't a movie so much as movie-spawned world unto itself, beset by entropy and poisoned by love. *Skol!*

## ANNE BILLSON

Writer/blogger, Belgium

**It Follows** David Robert Mitchell

**Marshland** Alberto Rodríguez

**The Duke of Burgundy** Peter Strickland

**Inherent Vice** Paul Thomas Anderson

**The Diary of a Teenage Girl**

Marielle Heller

● *It Follows* is a reminder that the scariest horror movies are low-budget independents starring no one you've ever heard of. Low-budget genre had an encouraging year with films like *What We Do in the Shadows*, *Coherence* and *Predestination* offering finely crafted alternatives to mega-budget pyrotechnics.

*Marshland* combines homicide, history and the Andalusian landscape to gripping effect, delivering everything the first season of *True Detective* promised but didn't quite pull off.

*The Duke of Burgundy* channels the 1970s vibe of Borowczyk and Larraz, but manages to be gloriously *sui generis* – and 100 times more erotic than *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Also funnier.

Anderson's intoxicating, melancholy Pynchon adaptation is the first of his films for which I've felt more than detached admiration. It's like smoking a fat joint and being transported into a long-vanished era when sex was still sexy and a bit unwashed. It's also blessed with the year's most beautiful original score.

It was a strong year for women, both in non-stereotypical leading roles (*Mad Max: Fury Road*, *45 Years*, *Mistress America*) and behind the camera (*Selma*, *Girlhood*, *Pitch Perfect 2*). But the most agreeable surprise was *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, a refreshingly non-judgemental 1970s coming-of-age yarn.

## PETER BRADSHAW

Critic, the Guardian, UK

**Inherent Vice**

Paul Thomas Anderson

**A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence** Roy Andersson

**London Road** Rufus Norris

**Hard to Be a God** Aleksei German

**Bridge of Spies** Steven Spielberg

## CATHERINE BRAY

Critic/producer, UK

**Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**Krishna** Trey Edward Shults

**Aaaaaaaah!** Steve Oram

**The Look Of Silence**

Joshua Oppenheimer

● Steve Oram's debut *Aaaaaaaah!* is absolutely unlike any other film I know, combining the toilet humour and farcicality of a five-year old's playground game with insights into how we fit together as a society as keen as anything I've ever seen – and it does it all without a word of human dialogue or a moment's boredom.

## TOM CHARITY

Programmer, VIFF Vancity

Theatre/freelance writer

**Right Now, Wrong Then** Hong Sang-soo

**Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes

**Anomalisa** Duke Johnson,

Charlie Kaufman

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**High-Rise** Ben Wheatley

● Honourable documentary mention: *In Transit* by the late, great Albert Maysles (and team) stood out for its modesty, its sympathy and its optimism. I have an inkling that Ozu would have loved it – and Hong Sang-soo's film too, a comedy of manners about choices and consequences which distils a lifetime of learning into an hour and a half. It was the year of the Welles centennial, and my favourite movie memories would have to include presenting Orson's *War of the Worlds* in a semi-observed cinema and recommending the somewhat bewildered audience watch with eyes wide shut. That, and seeing John Hillcoat's masterly *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead* again on 35mm for the first time in 25 years, its power and prescience validated at every turn.

## MICHEL CIMENT

Positif editor, France

**A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence** Roy Andersson

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**Knight of Cups** Terrence Malick

**Son of Saul** László Nemes

## ASHLEY CLARK

Critic/programmer, US

**Aaaaaaaah!** Steve Oram

**Anomalisa** Duke Johnson,

Charlie Kaufman

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

**Spy** Paul Feig

**Strolling** Cecile Emeke

● Some of the most essential filmmaking this year appeared

online in the form of Cecile Emeke's *Strolling*, a series of documentary shorts dedicated to illuminating the diverse yet frequently connected experiences of the international black diaspora. Emeke lets her subjects speak at length, but these are no mere talking-head exercises. The British-Jamaican director has an identifiable, idiosyncratic style characterised by slinky editing, subtly lilting musical cues and sharp sound editing.

As I get older and life gets harder, I've started to place greater importance on a good old-fashioned belly laugh. Paul Feig's spry *Spy* regularly had me gasping for air; Steve Oram's conceptually rigorous, relentlessly inventive *Aaaaaaaah!* is the most disgracefully funny British film in decades (that party scene!); while Colin Farrell's rumbled, bewildered comic turn in *The Lobster* is simply the best thing he's ever done.

My film of the year by a significant chalk, though, was *Anomalisa*, which somehow managed to leave me spiritually uplifted and chronically depressed at the same time. Its sad-faced, broken-spirited animatronic puppets seem more real than real people, while the genuinely moving (and, whisper it, a little titillating) sex scene casually dispatches the ones in *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* into a cocked hat.

## MARK COUSINS

Filmmaker/critic, UK

**The Russian Woodpecker** Chad Garcia

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

**The Duke of Burgundy**

Peter Strickland

**Something Better to**

**Come** Hama Polak

**The Falling** Carol Morley

● I've made three films this year, so you'd think I'd need a respite, but the opposite's the case. I crave cinema, and need to watch films in order to direct. Luckily, the past year has been like a film school: I learnt about acting from *The Wonders*, pattern from *Song of the Sea*, music from *Love & Mercy*, the sublime from *Transatlantic* at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, percussion from *Birdman*, design from the underrated *Jupiter Ascending*, stillness from *Selma*, story from *Eastern Boys*, point of view from *Theeb*, camera from *It Follows*, empathy from *Dreamcatcher*, chaos from *Mommy*, sound from *Francofonia*, structure from *The Pearl Button*, suspense from *Force majeure*, comedy from *Paddington*, text from *Concerning Violence*, staging from *Stations of the Cross* and confidence from rewatching a handful of movies by Chantal Akerman. All of the above could have been in my top five. Filmmakers – especially documentarians – thought anew in 2015. They pushed the medium forward.



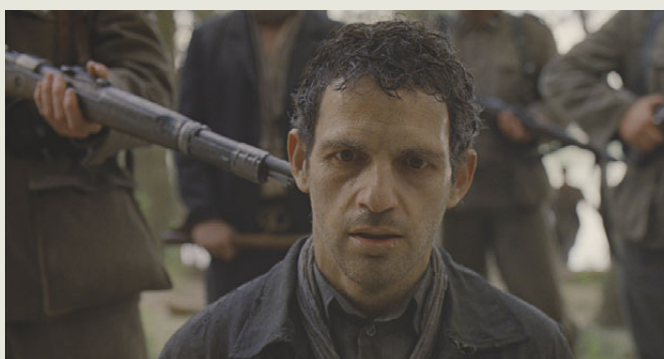




**10 Inherent Vice** Paul Thomas Anderson's intoxicating, melancholy Pynchon adaptation is... like smoking a fat joint and being transported into a long-vanished era when sex was still sexy and a bit unwashed. Anne Billson



**9 Amy** There are some shocking images in this desperately sad film... but ultimately it neither wallows in Amy's fate nor glamorises her tragedy. If it's distressing to watch, imagine how it felt to be her. Jane Giles, 'S&S', July 2015



**8 Son of Saul** Nemes goes out of his way to avoid Holocaust porn – snatches of epic scenes of crowds, vehicles, clothes, gas ovens and burnings are seen only at the edges of the frame.

Nick James, 'S&S', July 2015



#### MARIA DELGADO

Academic/critic, UK

**The Club** Pablo Larraín

**Ixcanul** Jayro Bustamante

**The Second Mother** Anna Muylaert

**The Pearl Button** Patricio Guzmán

**From Afar** Lorenzo Vigas

● Two remarkable performances from Chilean actor Alfredo Castro bookend my choices for 2015. Castro's moonshaped face is deployed to lean, expressive effect as the jittery greyhound racing priest in *The Club* and the emotionally detached dental prosthetist in *From Afar*. In both films he evokes the interior life of a character through the most minimal of gestures. Screen acting doesn't get much better than this. This year also showed political filmmaking in Latin America to be thriving. Both *The Club* and *The Pearl Button* expertly dissect the ideological and social implications of a culture of silence. In *From Afar*, the failure to come to terms with the abuses of the past generates an unsettling final sequence which creates a debate as provocative and puzzling as that of Haneke's *Hidden*. In *The Second Mother's* incisive unpicking of the wider issues of privilege underpinning Brazilian society, actress Regina Casé won me over with her toothy smile and warm comedy. *Ixcanul* melds a *Blood Wedding*-like tale of sexual longing with a delicate, detailed ethnographic ritual, humour (an unforgettable opening sequence of pigs being plied with rum to encourage procreation) and a remarkable ability to capture the wider emotional journeys of its characters.

#### ALLY DERKS

Festival director, IDFA, The Netherlands

**Cartel Land** Matthew Heineman

**A Syrian Love Story** Sean McAllister

**Bolshoi Babylon** Nick Read

**Human** Yann Arthus-Bertrand

**Requiem for the American Dream** Peter D. Hutchison, Kelly Nyks, Jared P. Scott

#### GRAHAM FULLER

Critic, US/UK

**Clouds of Sils Maria** Olivier Assayas

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**The Forbidden Room** Guy Maddin

**Horse Money** Pedro Costa

● While the complaints that there aren't enough strong roles for women remain valid in respect of Hollywood, *Clouds of Sils Maria*, *Carol* and *The Assassin* reiterated that great modern movies frequently focus on women's emotional and/or sociopolitical struggles. *Sils Maria* and *Carol* were concerned with much more than intense female relationships – ageing and celebrity on one hand, and patriarchal power-hoarding on the other – but they are visionary zeitgeist films in their disdain for sexual

labelling and as deconstructions of prescriptive behaviour. Adding to the sublime performances in these films, those of Anaïs Demoustier, truly a discovery in *The New Girlfriend*, and Carey Mulligan, to the Lambeth manor born in the overly didactic *Suffragette*, made 2015 a remarkable one for questing actresses.

#### RYAN GILBEY

Critic, *New Statesman*, UK

**It Follows** David Robert Mitchell

**London Road** Rufus Norris

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

**Phoenix** Christian Petzold

● Only in retrospect did it occur to me that my favourite films this year all happened to be female-oriented. *It Follows*, *London Road* and *Phoenix* show women rejecting notions of victimhood that originate in each case with men. At the start of *Carol*, a man hands over control of the narrative explicitly to women via a switch in the film's focus. And the title character in *Mad Max: Fury Road* finds that he is merely a passenger and a hanger-on – often literally – in the movie that bears his name. Women are the drivers of these stories (though only two of the five were actually written by women, and all were directed by men). Is it any coincidence that the latest James Bond film, *SPECTRE*, seems to stall without the organising intelligence of Judi Dench? Remove interesting female characters and a movie's world-view quickly runs out of fuel. Well, it follows...

#### MOLLY HASKELL

Author/critic, US

**Experimenter** Michael Almereyda

**Spotlight** Tom McCarthy

**Mistress America** Noah Baumbach

**About Elly** Asghar Farhadi

**Clouds of Sils Maria** Olivier Assayas

● This list is provisional, as many films remain to be seen.

#### JIM HOBERMAN

Critic, US

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**No Home Movie** Chantal Akerman

**Cemetery of Splendour**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

**Phoenix** Christian Petzold

**Amy** Asif Kapadia

#### PAMELA HUTCHINSON

Critic, UK

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**The Tribe** Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy

**A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night** Ana Lily Amirpour

**Clouds of Sils Maria** Olivier Assayas

**Eden** Mia Hansen-Løve

● Happily, a full list of my favourite releases of the year includes far more films by female directors than in previous years. And there were two expertly





## THE YEAR IN... ACTION FILMS

Despite the cynicism and predictability of some tentpole fare, such as 'Furious 7' and 'Jurassic World', the summer did bring signs of life for expressive action filmmaking, as well as a couple of low-budget treats. **By Nick Pinkerton**



**Man on fire:** Tom Cruise as Ethan Hunt in Christopher McQuarrie's *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation*

As the funerary procession of year-end lists begins, it's clear that two top 10 shoe-ins will be action movies, though you would be hard-pressed to find a pair of films that take more radically different approaches in their presentation of action. The first, George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road*, is the *ne plus ultra* of the chase picture, with Miller reworking the motorcade rundown from the last act of his *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981) on a far larger, persimmon-hued stage, effortlessly keeping the viewer aware at all times of spatial relationships and a natural cause-and-effect progression between shots, creating a huge, devilishly complicated chain reaction of hell-bent-for-leather kinetic force.

The second is Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Assassin*, the first foray into the *wuxia* genre by a director thought of as a standard bearer for a rarified, austere naturalist tradition, though such hard-and-fast cultural designations have never held such sway with Asian filmmakers – witness Wong Kar Wai's martial arthouse film *The Grandmaster* (2013) or Jia Zhangke's abstract nod to *wuxia* in *A Touch of Sin* (2013). Hou gives little priority to clarity of narrative or action, eliding essential plot

points and often filming fight choreography via sidelong glimpses, more suggestive than explicit. While Hou's technique is impeccable, to paraphrase a line in *The Assassin*, I've never quite understood the appeal of scratching at the lacquered surface of his films, though I'm willing to hold out hope that I'll find a point of entry.

Michael Mann's *Blackhat*, one of my own personal favorites, was unceremoniously

*It seems increasingly impossible these days for an action movie to catch a break without a bankroll north of \$100 million*



**Liam Neeson in** Jaume Collet-Serra's *Run All Night*

dumped into theatres in the January dead zone, and though it enjoyed nothing like the same groundswell of critical support as *The Assassin*, it might also be described as a deconstructed action film: a bluntly physical movie which takes place largely in a virtual space. *Blackhat* was a conspicuous box-office failure, but star Chris Hemsworth luckily held on to his day job as The Mighty Thor, appearing in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Unadjusted for inflation, *Ultron* now sits in the top ten of all-time grossers along with two other 2015 franchise behemoths – *Furious 7*, the latest in what began as a cycle of films about Los Angeles street racers before snowballing to obscene international mega-production proportions, topped only by *Jurassic World*, which, perhaps not coincidentally, is the only movie released this year more unsightly, incompetent and cynical than *Furious 7*.

The summer did bring some signs of life for expressive action filmmaking at the big-budget level: despite a troubled pre-production, Peyton Reed's *Ant-Man* came through with some of the more freewheeling and idiosyncratic set pieces in recent memory, and Christopher McQuarrie's *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* is proof of what a director with nuts-and-bolts bona fides can do with the help of a very powerful producer/star. In fact, it seems increasingly impossible these days for an action movie to catch a break without a bankroll north of \$100 million. While it's heartening to see that a junky hit-and-run exploitation number like *No Escape* can still pick audience pockets, more's the pity that Jaume Collet-Serra's consummately excellent *Run All Night* was unfairly labelled as another Liam Neeson potboiler. (I have not yet seen Jeremy Saulnier's mid-range *Green Room*, which was lauded on the festival circuit, but I remain dubious based on his previous work.)

The release of *SPECTRE* has come with much opining on the deleterious effect that Marvel Studios has had on the James Bond universe, but what future does the boot-on-the-ground, blue-collar action protagonist have in the era of pumped-up *Furious* Olympians and all-star superhero revues? Such questions will carry us into the next year's slate, after a 2015 that has included the ecstatic highs and enervating lows. **✎**



## THE YEAR IN... SILENT FILMS

The rediscovery of a lost reel of a Laurel and Hardy film, a new print of E.A. Dupont's masterful *'Variété'* and the first sight of a never-released film with an African-American cast were the high points of 2015. **By Pamela Hutchinson**



Easy riders: *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* (1913)



American pie: Laurel and Hardy in *The Battle of the Century* (1927)

It's been an odd year. One of the most rejoiced-over silent cinema rediscoveries of the year was casually announced, and concerned only a few feet of film, leaving the movie they came from still frustratingly incomplete. That said, the revelation at the Mostly Lost conference in Virginia this summer that the second reel of Laurel and Hardy's *The Battle of the Century* (1927) had been unearthed chimed happily with a resurgence of interest in the comedy duo. The near-intact film, climaxing with a pie fight that is a masterpiece of comic escalation, now has a balance and a sense of resolution that has been absent for years. Nevertheless, for many the hunt continues.

*The Battle of the Century* has begun to make its way around the festival circuit, after a low-key unveiling at Telluride in September, accompanied by a clutch of other recent finds and restorations. Debuting at Berlin, the sumptuous new 2k print of E.A. Dupont's masterful *Variété* (1925) won many admirers, although the response to the new score by the Tiger Lillies was rather more chilly. Elsewhere, Sherlockmania was fed by outings for a once-thought-lost 1916 film distinguished by the appearance of the stage's favourite Holmes, William Gillette. And in Bologna, Il Cinema Ritrovato unveiled the first fruits of a project to return all of Buster Keaton's features and shorts to their former glories.

But the most interesting archival discovery of recent times was a never-released film, *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* (1913), starring Bert Williams, a romantic comedy of substantial charm and cheeky good humour, which also offers a snapshot of a lost performance style. The film was shot by the Biograph studio, with an entirely African-American cast, some of whom wear blackface. The Lime Kiln Club gang, familiar to contemporary audiences from

*The rediscovered reel of 'The Battle of the Century' gives it balance and a sense of resolution that has been absent for years*



E.A. Dupont's *Variété* (1925)

stories and other films, embark on a day out, and the lead, played by Williams, begins a love affair with co-star Odessa Warren Grey. It's a slight story, delightfully played – but in its 2015 edit, it takes on a unique and fascinating form. In order to avoid imposing a false structure on this unedited project, restorer Ron Magliozzi presents all the extant takes and out-takes in one reel. The line between performer and character blur, and the setup gags, and the final kiss, are repeated and refined in front of our eyes. Magliozzi has mentioned intriguing plans to put the footage into the hands of prominent black artists for them to shape, but it was a privilege to see it in its 'raw' state first.

I saw *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* in October at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, which celebrated the end of one era, and the opening of another. After 19 years, David Robinson will stand down as the festival's artistic director, handing the baton to *Variété*'s Jay Weissberg, whose enthusiasm for the role is already evident. Pordenone's schedule is never light on treasures, but this year's consensus highlight was the majestic restoration of Henri Fescourt's *Les Misérables* (1925), which also screened in Paris. This impressively subtle Victor Hugo adaptation made light work of a fearsome 359-minute running time, with its attention to detail, painterly cinematography and some excellent screen performances. 🍿



executed variations on silent or dialogue-free filmmaking in cinemas this year too: with Aardman's lovable *Shaun the Sheep Movie* at one end of the spectrum and Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy's blistering *The Tribe* at the other.

#### ALEXANDER HORWATH

Director, Austrian Film Museum, Austria

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**No Home Movie** Chantal Akerman

**Über die Jahre** Nikolaus Geyrhof

**Cemetery of Splendour**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

**Neon Bull** Gabriel Mascaro

● Adopting the typical habit of greedy cinephiles (why five if there are ten or more?), I would suggest defining the year in cinema not only by the works listed above, but also by a further constellation: Miguel Gomes's *Arabian Nights*, Jem Cohen's *Counting*, Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's *Anomalisa*, Todd Haynes's *Carol*, Alex Ross Perry's *Queen of Earth*, George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* and Frederick Wiseman's *Jackson Heights*.

#### WENDY IDE

Critic, UK

**Anomalisa** Duke Johnson,

Charlie Kaufman

**Inside Out** Pete Docter

**The Other Side** Roberto Minervini

**Mustang** Deniz Gamze Ergüven

**Spotlight** Tom McCarthy

● It was particularly difficult to whittle the choice to five films this year – titles that nearly made the cut include *Carol*, *Son of Saul*, Zhao Liang's *Behemoth*, Pema Tseden's *Tharlo* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

#### NICK JAMES

Editor, *Sight & Sound*

**Amy** Asif Kapadia

**Evolution** Lucile Hadzihalilovic

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**Following Nazarín**

(*Tras Nazarín*) Javier Espada

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

● Choosing five films has always been a constraint, but it has become increasingly difficult as more films than ever are released theatrically. Though this poll's results are cheering, economically speaking it seems that it's becoming more of a risk to distribute foreign-language cinema, at least here in the UK.

My own choices are restricted by some omissions. I'm sad I haven't had the chance yet, in this year of her untimely death, to watch Chantal Akerman's *No Home Movie* as others have here. And I would like you to know that *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *45 Years*, *Son of Saul* and *Cemetery of Splendour* came close to inclusion in my list. *Following Nazarín*, I should explain, is a wonderful 'in the footsteps of' documentary about the making of Buñuel's *Nazarín*

that gave me enormous pleasure. For the coming year all cinephiles will need to become more serious and trenchant as keepers of the flame as the conditions for the nurturing of cinema history and legacy become ever more complex.

#### DAVID JENKINS

Editor, *Little White Lies*, UK

**My Golden Days** Arnaud Desplechin

**Knight of Cups** Terrence Malick

**Sunset Song** Terence Davies

**Aaaaaaaah!** Steve Oram

**Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes

● I can't recall a tougher year in which to shrink everything down to five solitary titles. The tricky fifth spot is in fact a dead heat, couldn't-fit-a-bus-ticket-between-them, six-way tie between *Arabian Nights*, Todd Haynes's *Carol*, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Assassin*, Hong Sang-soo's *Right Now, Wrong Then*, Chantal Akerman's *No Home Movie* and Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Evolution*. Gomes snags the spot purely because – erratic though his bawdy, mythic saga can sometimes be – you have to admire the sheer gusto of a film whose every frame is a personal, poetic response to a particular landscape at a particular time, and whose tone flits mischievously between the sincere and the ironic, often achieving the cinematic coup of clouding the two together. Plus, those 'almost' titles are examples of great directors being reliably great, so I'm sure they'll get their deserved garlands.

#### TREVOR JOHNSTON

Critic, UK

**Taxi Tehran** Jafar Panahi

**Room** Lenny Abrahamson

**Eden** Mia Hansen-Løve

**Home from Home: Chronicle of a Vision** Edgar Reitz

**A Most Violent Year** J.C. Chandor

● Not only but also: *45 Years*,

*Glassland*, *Hard to Be a God*, *P'tit*

*Quinquin* and *Song of the Sea*.

#### KENT JONES

Writer/filmmaker/festival director, US

**My Golden Days** Arnaud Desplechin

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**No Home Movie** Chantal Akerman

**Junun** Paul Thomas Anderson

#### PHILIP KEMP

Freelance reviewer/film historian, UK

**Inherent Vice** Paul Thomas Anderson

**Ex Machina** Alex Garland

**Girlhood** Céline Sciamma

**Inside Out** Pete Docter

**Theeb** Naji Abu Nowar

● The video revelation of the year was Raymond Bernard's *Wooden Crosses* (*Les Croix de bois*, 1932). The 2014 DVD/Blu-ray release of his massive 288-minute adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1934) had given notice that here was a once-feted

director who had unjustly slipped into obscurity; but *Wooden Crosses* revealed itself to be one of the finest – in fact, I'd go so far as to say the finest – films about World War I. Filmed largely on the actual battlefields of the Western Front, with a cast of army veterans (led by Charles Vanel) who had fought over this same terrain little more than a decade earlier, it has an authenticity and a searing intensity that makes *All Quiet on the Western Front* – generally reckoned the gold standard of WWI movies – seem tame and studio-bound by comparison. And Bernard's use of sound, involving a pioneering excursion into multi-tracking that he devised himself, renders his battle scenes as relentless and overwhelming in their sheer ear-shattering cacophony as any ever filmed.

#### DIETER KOSSLICK

Festival director, Berlinale, Germany

**Taxi Tehran** Jafar Panahi

**Victoria** Sebastian Schipper

**Love & Mercy** Bill Pohlad

**Body** Malgorzata Szumowska

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

#### DENNIS LIM

Director of programming,

Film Society of Lincoln Center, US

**Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes

**Cemetery of Splendour**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**Visit, or Memories and**

**Confessions** Manoel de Oliveira

**Lost and Beautiful** Pietro Marcello

#### ADRIAN MARTIN

Critic, Spain/Australia

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

**White Out, Black In** Adirley Queirós

**La Sapienza** Eugène Green

**The Smell of Us** Larry Clark

● On the small screen, highlights

of the year for me were Steven Soderbergh's remarkable history drama *The Knick*, even stronger as it enters its second season; and the surprising *Better Call Saul*, far more complex and engaging than its tag as *Breaking Bad*'s spin-off/prequel would have led anyone to expect.

#### SOPHIE MAYER

Writer/activist, UK

**Selma** Ava DuVernay

**Dreamcatcher** Kim Longinotto

**Timbuktu** Abderrahmane Sissako

**Drunktown's Finest** Sydney Freeland

**Public House** Sarah Turner

● As Sarah Turner reflected in her Q&A after the world premiere of *Public House*, there is a marked shift in the zeitgeist from the individual to the collective. While the action hero and prestige biopic continue to dominate the box office, *Selma* relates its remarkable, heroic biography to and through an activist community. *Dreamcatcher* and *Timbuktu*, meanwhile, emphasise the possibilities of collective action spearheaded by extraordinary individuals in extraordinary circumstances; with a combination of delicacy and fierce commitment, they capture the impetus to take courageous action, and its impact. *Drunktown's Finest* and *Public House* are moving portraits of (very different) resilient communities in dispossessed places, and of the power of speaking together to connect across generations, genders and classes. Andrea Luka Zimmerman's *Estate: A Reverie* received a Jarman Award nomination for documenting, and participating in, collective resistance against austerity in the UK. So, collective films – and the return of film collectives, packing houses and making trouble: the Bechdel Test Fest, Club des Femmes, the Reel Good Film Club, Raising Films, New Black Film Collective, Film Fatales; curators, filmmakers and activists regenerating the community of UK cinema with the energy and excitement that emerge from equity and inclusion.



Inside Out



**DANIELA MICHEL**

Director, Morelia International  
Film Festival, Mexico

**Son of Saul** László Nemes

**Inside Out** Pete Docter

**The Childhood of a Leader** Brady Corbet

**Right Now, Wrong Then** Hong Sang-soo

**Victoria** Sebastian Schipper

**HENRY K. MILLER**

Critic, UK

**Blackhat** Michael Mann

**While We're Young** Noah Baumbach

**Clouds of Sils Maria** Olivier Assayas

**Mistress America** Noah Baumbach

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

**KIM MORGAN**

Writer/programmer, US

**Inherent Vice** Paul Thomas Anderson

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**The Hateful Eight** Quentin Tarantino

**Maps to the Stars** David Cronenberg

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

● The brilliant *Inherent Vice* is perfect and a perfect obsession. Like Doc Sportello unravelling the knotty mysteries and pining for his love, the era's dark undercurrent snakes into your soul while remaining timelessly heartbreaking and understandably paranoid. Demented, hilarious, romantic, melancholic and lyrical, *Vice* is a lover we can never leave, even if she doesn't want us anymore.

*Carol*'s mink-coated beauty is a superbly crafted, mesmerising look at 50s taboo love that fills you with gorgeous, painful yearning. Sublime.

*Hateful*'s pressure-cooker plot, virtuoso performances, style, wit and 70mm snowbound beauty is old-fashioned and radical and like nothing you've ever seen. Samuel L. Jackson and Jennifer Jason Leigh tear it up.

Hollywood explications seem only to work when the director damns the rules and dares to be impressionistic, ghoulish and certifiably insane (*Sunset Blvd.*, *Barton Fink*). Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars* goes there – incest, dead dogs, self-immolation and all.

*Mad Max: Fury Road* is unrelenting, beautiful and inventive. It becomes an action-packed poem.

And tied in fifth place with *Mad Max* is Amy Kapadia's film is shattering, told by existing footage when that's now creepily and yet powerfully possible. Everything is recorded. That we can gawk at a person's ascension and decline comments on both Winehouse's tragedy and our own relentless chronicling and voyeurism.

**KIM NEWMAN**

Writer/critic, UK

**The Duke of Burgundy** Peter Strickland

**Inherent Vice** Paul Thomas Anderson

**Tales of Hoffmann** (rerelease)

Emeric Pressburger, Michael Powell

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

**Frankenstein** Bernard Rose

**ANDREA PICARD**

Film curator, TIFF, Canada

**Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien

**Cemetery of Splendour**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

**Visit, or Memories and**

**Confessions** Manoel de Oliveira

**No Home Movie** Chantal Akerman

● With its wondrous Arabian nights and cemeteries of splendour – signalling both loss and resurrection – 2015 was a year of sudden junctures, including Gérard Depardieu's massive performance in *Valley of Love*; Athina Rachel Tsangari's London Film Festival-winner *Chevalier*; markers of a new Italian cinema in *Bella e Perduta*, *The Other Side* and *Il Solengo*; a thriving Canadian avant garde pulsating through *Bring Me the Head of Tim Horton* (Guy Maddin, Evan Johnson, Galen Johnson), *88:88* (Isiah Medina) and *Engram of Returning* (Daichi Saito); a new Philippe Garrel (*In the Shadow of Women*) that is more slyly humorous than sullen; an offering in the form of a conversation between Tsai Ming-liang and Lee Kang-sheng in *Afternoon*; necessary narcoleptic rhythms in Nicolás Pereda's *Minotaur*; nocturnal evasions and static electricity in Lois Patiño's *Night Without Distance*; genius insta-drawings from iconoclastic Polish artist Wojciech Bakowski; two great UFOs – *Santa Teresa* and *Other Stories* and *El movimiento* – from young Latin American talents Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias and Benjamin Naishtat; and more Romanian gems from Corneliu Porumboiu (*The Treasure*) and Radu Muntean (*One Floor Below*). Hou surpassed earthly delights, Albert Serra reminded us of his singularity, Manoel de Oliveira brought us his own *News from Nowhere* and Chantal Akerman rigorously searched for, and hopefully, most deservedly, found hers.

**NICK PINKERTON**

Writer/programmer, US

**Blackhat** Michael Mann

**Carol** Todd Haynes

**Mad Max: Fury Road** George Miller

**Hard to Be a God** Aleksei German

**Heaven Knows What** Benny

Safdie, Josh Safdie

**JAMES QUANDT**

Curator/critic, Canada

**Labour in a Single Shot**

Antje Ehmann, Harun Farocki

**Visit, or Memories and**

**Confessions** Manoel de Oliveira

**Bleak Street** Arturo Ripstein

**Singularity** Albert Serra

**Neon Bull** Gabriel Mascaro

**NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN**

Critic, UK/India

**Room** Lenny Abrahamson

**Aligarh** Hansal Mehta

**The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien



**7 45 Years** A display of fine acting and quiet observation on a restrained cinematic scale that's as unshowy, subtle and effective as director Andrew Haigh's surprise hit 'Weekend'.

Nick James, 'S&S' Berlin report, February 2015



**6 No Home Movie** I chose Chantal Akerman's final film not out of sentiment, but because it's great cinema, the equal of her 'Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles'.

Amy Taubin



**5 Cemetery of Splendour** Gorgeous, lovely and meditative, it brings together all of the expressive idioms we've seen director Apichatpong Weerasethakul use in the past.

Nick James, 'S&S' Cannes report, May 2015



## THE YEAR IN ... CRITICAL DEBATE

Questions concerning inclusivity and the politics of representation, both in front of and behind the camera – and in the choice of what's shown on the big screen – dominated discussions about cinema. **By Jemma Desai and David Edgar**

The white, cisgendered, heterosexual Hollywood dream has taken a beating this year, with the leaked Sony emails revealing the extent of the A-list gender pay gap and the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite gaining traction. The year ends with a contrast: triumph for the female-fronted *Suffragette*, and studio backing for an Oscar campaign for *Tangerine*'s lead trans actors Mya Taylor and Kitana Kiki Rodriguez. Both *Suffragette* and *Tangerine* bring 'marginal' identities to the centre, but they also typify the political complexities and cultural anxieties in current thinking on representation and authorship: *Tangerine* is directed by Sean Baker, a white cis man, and *Suffragette* has been dogged by accusations of whitewashing women's history.

The politics of representation was everywhere in film discourse this year – not least in *Sight & Sound*'s 'Female Gaze' October issue. Drawing attention to 'overlooked' films by female directors, it hit stands soon after many of our favourite films seen on the festival circuit in 2014 (like *Girlhood*, *Honeytrap* and *Appropriate Behaviour*) received their theatrical releases in the UK, seemingly telling a powerful story of a new female auteurship. Attention to visibility for these directors was welcome, but as programmers and cinephiles we were left seeking nuance, because in 2015, while many of our favourite festival films were about women, they were directed by men (to *Tangerine* we would add *Carol*, *Victoria*, *Brooklyn*). Were we bad feminists?

A series of insightful articles in the online magazine *Reverse Shot* in November offered us another way to look at things. Advocating a radical reassignment of authorship, the series suggested displacing directors in favour of actors ("Juliette Binoche's *Clouds of Sils Maria*") or screenwriters ("Callie Khouri's *Thelma and Louise*"). While the least productive contributions to the debates about representation this year have had the deadening ring of auteurism, the most fruitful have been about sharing perspectives and encouraging collective debate. So if authorship could be decentered and reassigned, could it also be complicated and multiplied? Our cinematic year saw powerful female-centred narratives emerge out of close artistic collaborations (between Sean Baker and Mya Taylor, Todd Haynes and Phyllis Nagy, Nick Hornby and Saoirse Ronan), but it also saw women telling powerful stories about men and masculinity (with Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Evolution* and Athina Rachel Tsangari's *Chevalier*).

At the 22nd Elle Hollywood awards, Ava DuVernay addressed the year's discussions on diversity, partly instigated by the perceived snub for her civil rights drama *Selma*, championing a discourse that was less about conflicting agendas and more

*In exhibition, 2015 was a year when institutions and studios were called out for failing to cater for a diverse audience*

about a collective empathy. "I really hate the word 'diversity,'" she said. "There's an emotional disconnect. 'Inclusion' feels closer; 'belonging' is even closer. Because we all belong to film." Putting her money where her mouth is, DuVernay closed her year with the launch of ARRAY a "community-based distribution collective dedicated to the amplification of films by people of color and women filmmakers".

In exhibition, 2015 was a year in which institutions and studios were called out for failing to represent and cater for a diverse audience. The BFI's initial decision not to support the release of *Dear White People*, and Universal's not to theatrically release *Beyond the Lights* in the UK seemed to show that "the man" didn't much care to listen. By contrast, we could see productive conversation in the renewed wave of what our fellow BFI programmer Kate Taylor has called "cinophile activism", which had curiosity, plurality and diversity at its heart. UK-based collectives such as Club Des Femmes, Reel Good Film Club and The Bechdel Test Fest disrupted the idea of individual/institutional cultural gatekeepers by rushing the stage to seize control of the screen, and to continue discussions that had begun on social media. In the midst of the noise, a space has opened up for a new criticism that might adapt and reflect on this plurality. Like this piece – co-authored by friends and collaborators – we hope it embraces the creative abrasions of the year's discourse. ☺



Small time: *Beyond the Lights* was denied a UK theatrical release



Climate of change: an Oscar campaign for *Tangerine*'s actors is heartening



## THE YEAR IN ... DISTRIBUTION

The digital apocalypse that some critics warned would kill off cinemas hasn't happened, but we are still living in a transitional period and the dividing line between 'film' and 'TV' feels closer than ever before. **By Nick Roddick**



**Captive audience: Netflix subscribers spend 77 per cent of their viewing time watching TV series like *Orange Is the New Black* and only 23 per cent on films**

I am writing this mid-way between the opening of *SPECTRE*, which broke several records (for example, the biggest single-day gross in French box-office history), and the launch of the new *Star Wars*, which set advance-booking records pretty much as soon as tickets went on sale. So all is well with the film distribution business, then?

The answer depends on whether you agree with the latter film's godfather George Lucas, who, a couple of years ago, predicted that soon, "Going to the movies will cost 50 bucks or 100 bucks or 150 bucks, like what Broadway costs today. There'll be big movies on a big screen, and it'll cost a lot of money. Everything else will be on a small screen".

Well, maybe. Certainly, the dividing line between 'film' and 'TV' is narrower than it has ever been. But so far the digital apocalypse, in which cinemas would be replaced by Netflix & co, hasn't materialised. Cinemas have not yet gone the way of HMV and the Virgin Megastore.

Indeed, if anything, the move has been in the other direction, with both Netflix and Amazon testing the waters with films destined for cinema release, even if the lessons learned could be summed up so far in one word: don't. Netflix's first foray

into specialist cinema releasing, *Beasts of No Nation*, took just \$90,777 at the US box office, or 1.5 per cent of its estimated budget before marketing costs.


Of course, theatrical release is only one of several options to recoup on that and any other film – which is where this year's buzz word comes in. Its use previously restricted to railway stations, political rallies and 1970s footwear, 'platforms' is now in regular use to describe the multiple ways of getting value out of a film. This time last year, 'multi-platform' releases were combatively rare; now they're everywhere, as films become available on DVD and download at the same time as they open – briefly – in a cinema near you (so long as you live in London).

For the cinephile, this is currently good news: a wider range of films is being made available. And for the cinephile happy not to be too purist about cinema, there is the excitement of seeing a new visual narrative emerge on those 13-part TV series which is part soap opera, part epic. Look, for instance,

*Without a theatrical window, how are viewers going to know what they want delivered?*

at what the writers of *Orange Is the New Black* were able to do in the second and third seasons with characters like Big Boo, Red and Pennsatucky: stereotypical in season one, they became complex and engaging characters in two and three. You need more than 90 minutes to do that.

But will it last? And is video on demand really a friend to the movie business? A recent study of viewing habits by GfK USA suggests otherwise, claiming that Netflix subscribers spent 77 per cent of their time watching TV programmes (including catch-up), and just 23 per cent on movies; the figures for Amazon were 79 per cent and 21 per cent; for Hulu 96 per cent and four per cent.

We seem to be living through a transition period between distribution and delivery – from the top-down machinery on which Hollywood built its hegemony and through which it controlled what, where and when we see films; and the delivery of visual content as and when the consumer wants it, which is the hallmark of the internet era. The question that remains unanswered is: without a theatrical window, how are viewers going to know – or even know about – what they want delivered? 





**Baahubali: The Beginning**  
S.S. Rajamouli

**Amy Asif Kapadia**

● What a great year for film it has been. While enough has been written already about *Room*, *The Assassin* and *Amy*, I would like to highlight *Aligarh*, a gay drama from India which is a sombre look at the right to privacy or the lack thereof in the country. At the other end of the scale is the historical period extravaganza *Baahubali: The Beginning*, India's biggest budget film ever, which was still made with only a fraction of the money of a Hollywood equivalent.

**JONATHAN ROMNEY**

Critic, UK

**Son of Saul** László Nemes

**The Forbidden Room** Guy Maddin

**Inside Out** Pete Docter

**Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes

**Anomalisa** Duke Johnson,  
Charlie Kaufman

● Not a vintage year, and even somewhat disheartening in its overall lack of energy – but a handful of films really mattered. *Son of Saul*'s chillingly lucid depiction of the unthinkable genuinely rewrote the book on Holocaust cinema. Miguel Gomes's socioeconomic fantasia took an ostensibly bleak reality and found a joyously dizzy new form of hybrid cinema. And *Anomalisa* invented its own strange new form to soberingly demonstrate the way that our emotions are being overwhelmed by corporate language.

My other two choices just exploded with exuberance – *The Forbidden Room* in an utterly personal manner, *Inside Out* in a way that triumphantly demonstrated the invention and intelligence that Pixar seemed to have forgotten of late.

Let's also mention: *Taxi Tehran*, Laurie Anderson's *Heart of a Dog*, *Mistress America*, *45 Years*, *Tangerine*, *Cemetery of Splendour*, and the missing-in-action sleeper I hope will re-emerge soon: *Winter Song* by the inestimable Otar Iosseliani. The (US) rerelease I was happiest to see: Tsai Ming-liang's *Rebels of the Neon God*. And it was good to see people getting excited about Aleksei German's *Hard to Be a God* – proof that cinema can still discover its own strange dark continents of the mind.

**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM**

Freelance writer/blogger/teacher, US

**Ex Machina** Alex Garland

**I, Dario** Mark Rappaport

**Jauja** Lisandro Alonso

**Journey to the West** Tsai Ming-liang

**The Thoughts That Once**

**We Had** Thom Andersen

● The order is alphabetical. It's no surprise to me that two of my selections (one of them a short) qualify as film criticism cast in the language of the medium. This was a strong year for

film criticism in general, considering the publications of Girish Shambu's *The New Cinephilia* and Adrian Martin's *Mise En Scène and Film Style* (among others), not to mention the still burgeoning video output of Kevin B. Lee (full disclosure: I collaborated on a couple of his efforts). Even *Ex Machina* manages to imply certain thoughtful critical commentaries about both the Tarkovsky *Solaris* and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, whereas the spooky beauty and mystery of *Jauja*, for all the film's originality, might be said to reinvent both the western and the medieval saga.

**SUKHDEV SANDHU**

Associate professor,  
New York University, US

**'36 to '77** Berwick Street Film Collective

**By Our Selves** Andrew Kötting

**Big Gold Dream** Grant McPhee

**Black Code/Code Noir** Louis Henderson

**A Filmless Festival** Multiple directors

● '36 to '77 was completed in 1978, but screened publicly for the first time in November as part of a Marc Karlin retrospective in New York. Originally envisaged as a follow-up to *Nightcleaners*, the Berwick Street Collective's portrait of the campaign to unionise female office-block cleaners, '36 to '77 makes that challenging fusion of activist sentiment and avant-garde aesthetics seem almost conservative. It fractures sound, slows down images and zooms in on Myrtle, its central subject, with idolatrous, almost heretical fascination. Outer-limit cinema at its most beautiful.

In *By Our Selves*, repeat offenders Andrew Kötting and Iain Sinclair team up again to cussed, haunting effect in this fractured anti-epic of mad travel based on the life of peasant poet John Clare who's played by an eloquently mute Toby Jones.

The sound of young Scotland in the late 1970s and early 1980s comes thrillingly, angularly alive in *Big Gold Dream*, a group biography of Bob Last's Fast Product and Alan Horne's Postcard labels. The archival footage of Edinburgh is gloomily splendid, the interviews sharp and witty, the music still incandescent.

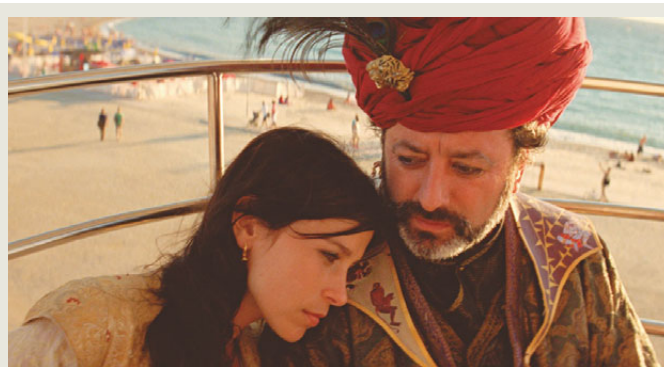
Intellectually adventurous and then some, Henderson's video essay *Black Code/Code Noir* deploys algorithms and archaeology to probe the pathologies and economies behind the killing of contemporary black America.

Collectively made, *A Filmless Festival* is a chronicle and defiant commemoration of 2014's cancelled Beijing Independent Film Festival.

**JASPER SHARP**

Author, artistic director of Asia  
House Film Festival/co-director of  
The Creeping Garden, UK

**In the Absence of the**  
**Sun** Lucky Kuswandi



**4 Arabian Nights** The most ambitious undertaking at Cannes was Miguel Gomes's quasi-adaptation of the classic Middle Eastern folktales. There is always a deliriously surprising turn in the waiting. Isabel Stevens, 'S&S', July 2015



**3 Mad Max: Fury Road** A diesel-exhaust-belching manifesto on the physics of screen action. In the presence of the real deal shall bloviated franchises and committee blockbusters scatter to the wind. Nick Pinkerton, 'S&S', July 2015



**2 Carol** Masterfully intelligent and meticulous... Each shot and scene is carefully composed to pay homage to 50s cinema, yet infused with an emotional ambiguity which feels decidedly contemporary. Kate Stables, 'S&S', December 2015





### The Death and Resurrection Show *Shaun Pettigrew*

**The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution** *Stanley Nelson*

**Lucifer** *Gust Van den Berghe*

**Factory Boss** *Wei Zhang*

● I saw some wonderful films on the festival circuit this year, many from countries you probably wouldn't expect. It is a sad commercial fact of life that so few of these will ever find an audience in the UK beyond one-off festival screenings, but to my list, I would like to add the following: Saodat Ismailova's *40 Days of Silence* (Chilla), a co-production between the Netherlands, Uzbekistan, Germany and France; Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu* from France/Mauritania; Yusef Baraki's Afghan-Canadian film *Mina Walking*; and Yermek Tursunov's Kazakh film *Stranger* (Zhat) – as well as Roger Waters and Sean Evans's *Roger Waters: The Wall* and Richard Golezowski and Mark Burton's *Shaun the Sheep Movie*.

### GAVIN SMITH

Editor, *Film Comment*, US

**Sunset Song** *Terence Davies*

**It Follows** *David Robert Mitchell*

**Electric Boogaloo: The Wild, Untold Story of Cannon Films** *Mark Hartley*

**The Assassin** *Hou Hsiao-Hsien*

**My Golden Days** *Arnaud Desplechin*

### IMOGEN SARA SMITH

Freelance writer, US

**Phoenix** *Christian Petzold*

**In Jackson Heights** *Frederick Wiseman*

**Heart of a Dog** *Laurie Anderson*

**Carol** *Todd Haynes*

**The Wolfpack** *Crystal Moselle*

● While I was heartened by several fine examples of the classic female-centred melodrama, including *Phoenix* and *Carol*, many of the films I was most moved by this year were documentaries, culminating in Frederick Wiseman's magnificent *In Jackson Heights*. These films, even more than many fiction features, left me thinking about how cinema tells stories, perhaps because they work backwards from existing facts and footage: everything is in the selection, the editing, the presentation. Laurie Anderson tells stories about telling stories in her lovely *Heart of a Dog*, while Crystal Moselle's *The Wolfpack* follows a group of brothers whose identities are formed through movies – including, ultimately, the movie they are appearing in. Perhaps the fact that Frederick Wiseman's *In Jackson Heights* documents a district I pass through every day on the train brings home most forcefully what a filmmaker can reveal simply through what he or she chooses to look at and show us; I came out of the movie feeling that though I'd been to the neighbourhood many times I'd never really been 'in' Jackson Heights before.

### FERNANDA SOLOZARNO

Critic, Mexico

**Son of Saul** *László Nemes*

**The Club** *Pablo Larraín*

**Kings of Nowhere** *Betzabé García*

**Heart of a Dog** *Laurie Anderson*

**The Witch** *Robert Eggers*

● My favourite films of 2015 shared a very subjective quality: they were haunting and evocative, and lingered for a long time. You could say that of any Holocaust film, but the overwhelming point of view of *Son of Saul* makes detachment impossible. The shallow depth of field results in a blurry background that underscores the notion of ungraspable horror.

Verging on the surreal, the documentary *Kings of Nowhere* (*Los reyes del pueblo que no existe*) tells the story of a flooded Mexican village in which just three of 300 families decide to stay behind. The characters are philosophical about their situation and the sights are beautiful in their strangeness.

Disturbing in a different way, *The Club* takes place in a community house inhabited by the 'bad apples' of the Catholic Church. Less satirical than Larraín's previous films, it's nonetheless poignant.

The lyrical essay *Heart of a Dog* has an oneiric mood: Anderson meditates on the hidden blessings of grief, triggered by the death of her dog.

With its masterful use of suspense, *The Witch* is both an accurate

portrait of religious fanaticism and a supernatural tale. Not just haunting but downright eerie.

### KATE STABLES

Critic, UK

**Carol** *Todd Haynes*

**45 Years** *Andrew Haigh*

**Macbeth** *Justin Kurzel*

**Tangerine** *Sean Baker*

**Girlhood** *Céline Sciamma*

### BRAD STEVENS

Critic/novelist, UK

**Stray Dogs** *Tsai Ming-liang*

**Pasolini** *Abel Ferrara*

**Goodbye to Language** *Jean-Luc Godard*

**Inherent Vice** *Paul Thomas Anderson*

**Life May Be** *Mania Akbari, Mark Cousins*

● The Vera Chytilová season at the BFI Southbank in London was an obvious highlight of the year. Other films I enjoyed include Aleksei German's *Hard to Be a God*, Woody Allen's *Magic in the Moonlight*, David Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars*, Ari Folman's *The Congress*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Winter Sleep* and Jia Zhangke's *Mountains May Depart*. Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* was one of the richest films I saw this year, its richness arising from the constant tension between the director and his material. I'm not yet sure how successful it is (it's a work that obviously needs to be studied in depth), but I suspect it may be the last gasp of a certain kind of auteurist filmmaking.



**1 The Assassin** *Hou Hsiao-Hsien* constantly makes us feel almost as if we're watching something we've never seen before... it is groundbreaking cinema of astonishing ambition and assurance. Geoff Andrew, 'S&S' Cannes report, May 2015

### AMY TAUBIN

Critic, US

**No Home Movie** *Chantal Akerman*

**The Assassin** *Hou Hsiao-Hsien*

**Amy** *Asif Kapadia*

**Carol** *Todd Haynes*

**Experimenter** *Michael Almereyda*

● I chose *No Home Movie* not out of sentiment, but because it's great cinema, the equal of her *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). There were many excellent movies this year, too many to narrow down to five. With so few, I'm forced to give preference to the brilliantly formed as opposed to the amazingly innovative, such as Sean Baker's *Tangerine*. There, I've sneaked in a movie that is a sneak attack through and through.

### ANNE THOMPSON

Editor in chief, *Thompson*

on Hollywood, US

**Mad Max: Fury Road** *George Miller*

**Son of Saul** *László Nemes*

**Spotlight** *Tom McCarthy*

**Beasts of No Nation** *Cary Joji Fukunaga*

**45 Years** *Andrew Haigh*

### DAVID THOMPSON

Film writer/director of arts

documentaries, UK

**It Follows** *David Robert Mitchell*

**Wild Tales** *Damián Sziffrón*

**My Golden Days** *Arnaud Desplechin*

**The Diary of a Teenage**

**Girl** *Marielle Heller*

**45 Years** *Andrew Haigh*

### GINETTE VINCENTEAU

Professor in film studies, UK

**Clouds of Sils Maria** *Olivier Assayas*

**Much Loved** *Nabil Ayouch*

**Standing Tall** *Emmanuelle Bercot*

**Force majeure** *Ruben Ostlund*

**Amy** *Asif Kapadia*

● Two of the strongest film moments for me this year came from classic films seen on a big screen: John Huston's *The Misfits* (1961) at BFI Southbank in London and Raoul Walsh's *Pursued* (1947) in a restored print at one of the Rue Champollion cinemas in Paris. Both are magnificent noirs with heartbreaking and dazzling performances: Robert Mitchum is electrifying in *Pursued*.

### THIRZA WAKEFIELD

Critic, UK

**The Royal Road** *Jenni Olson*

**Inherent Vice** *Paul Thomas Anderson*

**Force Majeure** *Ruben Ostlund*

**Enemy** *Denis Villeneuve*

**Cemetery of Splendour**

*Apichatpong Weerasethakul*

### CATHERINE WHEATLEY

Academic/critic, UK

**Phoenix** *Christian Petzold*

**Eden** *Mia Hansen-Løve*

**45 Years** *Andrew Haigh*

**Timbuktu** *Abderrahmane Sissako*

**The Wonders** *Alice Rohrwacher*



# new wave films



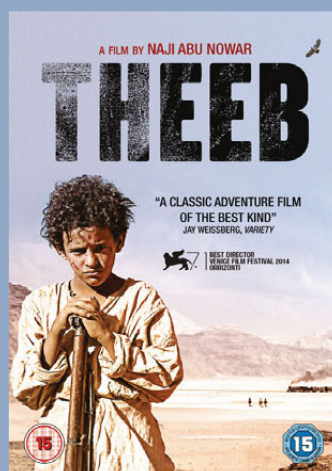
## Theeb

Naji Abu Nowar

Shot entirely on location in Wadi Rum in Jordan, (where David Lean shot *Lawrence of Arabia*), *Theeb* is a remarkable accomplishment, a genre-crossing blend of a coming-of-age drama and a western.

In the middle of World War I a young Bedouin boy, Theeb, embarks on a perilous desert journey with his brother to guide a British officer to a secret destination.

● Available now on DVD and download



'Eye-searing landscapes and a fascinating historical setting turn this tale of innocence lost into a classic adventure film... Truly memorable.'

Trevor Johnston, Time Out



'It's classical, muscular storytelling, heart-stoppingly tense at points, and boasts landscapes worth fighting for.'

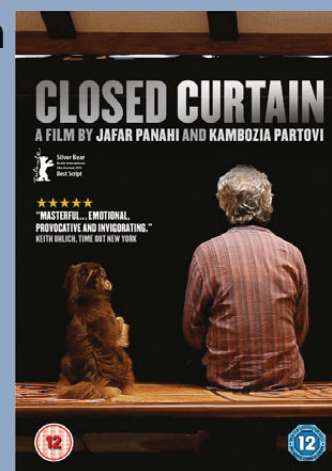
Guy Lodge, The Standard

## Closed Curtain

Jafar Panahi and Kambozia Partovi

Two people barricade themselves in a secluded villa. Are we looking at outlaws, or are they merely phantoms, figments of the imagination of a filmmaker who is no longer allowed to work? Jafar Panahi's second film made whilst under a ban from making films, and co-directed by Kambozia Partovi (who also acts in the film), is a demonstration of the indomitability of artistic endeavour and freedom wrapped in a multi-layered form where illusion and reality change places with dizzying results.

● Available now on DVD and download



'... another masterful, multifaceted feature... The journey is often challenging, but the rewards – heady, emotional, provocative and invigorating – are endless.'

Keith Uhlich, Time Out



'A riveting meditation on censorship and defiance.'

Bekzhan Sarsenbay, Little White Lies

Order from [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)

[www.newwavefilms.co.uk](http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk)

BFI  
Film  
Forever



'ASTONISHING –  
SO FEROCIOUS,  
SO HAUNTING'

MARTIN SCORSESE

'THE  
GREATEST  
OF ALL  
AFRICAN  
FILMMAKERS'  
FILM COMMENT

Limited Dual Format Edition of Ousmane Sembène's first major work *Black Girl* and short film *Borom Sarret*. Released for the first time in the UK.

[amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)





PROFILE

## LIBERATED TERRITORIES

Haile Gerima offers inspiration to filmmakers outside the mainstream, through his films, his teaching – and even his sandwiches

**By Ashley Clark**

The career of the Ethiopian-born, American-based writer-director Haile Gerima is a fascinating case study of the challenges faced by left-leaning, formally experimental black filmmakers. Consider the fate of his 1993 film *Sankofa*, a visceral, tonally poetic and visually seductive study of an American fashion model who is magically transported back in time from Ghana's Cape Coast Castle to the antebellum American South and transformed into a house slave. Here, she falls in love with a rebellious field slave who implores her to poison her white owners.

Like a more esoteric forebear of *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *Sankofa* offers a stark immersion into the plantation experience for both central character and viewer. Through a complex, detailed portrait of intra-slave relations, it offers sharp commentary on the power of self-knowledge, the fruits of activism and, metaphorically, the continued sublimation of slave mentality and practice within contemporary American

society. As Gerima told the journalist Assata Wright, "If you view America as a plantation, then you can codify the different classes and interest groups within the society. You find overseers, head slaves, you find plantation owners in a very advanced, sophisticated way."

Despite Gerima's serious pedigree – in the 1970s he was a leading light of UCLA's feted 'LA Rebellion' movement alongside Charles Burnett and Larry Clark (not the one who made *Kids*) – raising the funds for *Sankofa* took nine gruelling years. And despite the film's evident artistic qualities and positive reception at international festivals, major American distributors, sceptical of its earning potential and perhaps cowed by its revolutionary thrust, wouldn't touch it. Unbowed, Gerima opted for the exhausting self-distribution route. He wasn't starting from scratch, though: in 1982 he made *Ashes & Embers*, a bracing, elliptical psychodrama about the slow spiritual awakening of a troubled black Vietnam vet-turned-actor. To enable its release, the director, alongside his filmmaker wife Shirikiana Aina and sister Selome, set up the company Mypheduh Films in the basement of his home in Washington, DC.

So, in the days before lightweight digital, Gerima took *Sankofa* to 35 different cities, and it finally grossed nearly \$3 million. It was especially successful with black audiences; as Gerima has

written, "I witnessed theaters across America turn into night schools, as intense discourse was sparked among audience members, and as the black image was re-framed on-screen."

With the profits from *Sankofa*, in 1997 Gerima and his family moved their operations to a large property unit in Washington, a stone's throw from the prestigious all-black Howard University, where Gerima has taught film since 1975, converting it into Sankofa Video and Books. The store still thrives, as I discovered on a recent visit. Its walls are lined with DVDs and books about black history and culture, while Gerima frequently hosts screenings in the parking lot and open mic nights for poets and musicians. A cafe, added in 2007, sells food items named after esteemed African and African-American directors – a 'Charles Burnett' is a panini filled with pesto, smoked mozzarella, dill, tomato and olives (suggesting that no sheep were killed in its creation). Gerima, a stocky, white-bearded, softly spoken 69-year-old, told me, "When

*English is a very imperial language... you feel like all your characters have to speak it to be in a movie*



Haile Gerima: 'If you view America as a plantation, then you can codify the different classes... You find overseers, head slaves, you find plantation owners'

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES



the black community meet here they call it 'liberated territory', which means a place where folks can come to study and think critically."

Sankofa Video Books & Cafe is also a crucial part of Gerima's independent filmmaking apparatus, fitted with editing facilities where he and Shirikiana can cut their films and educate students. In his downstairs editing suite Gerima showed me a series of clips from his current project, *The Children of Adwa*, a documentary about the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, which lasted from October 1935 to May 1936. Gerima inherited the project from his father, the playwright and historian Abba Gerima Tafere, author of books such as *Gondere Begashaw* – a chronicle, written in Amharic, of anti-fascist uprisings during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia from 1936-41. Gerima has been recording the testimony of Ethiopian fighters for around 20 years, and intends to make his research available to historians.

*The Children of Adwa* is a companion piece to both his award-winning historical epic *Teza* (2008) and, more specifically, *Adwa* (1999), a lyrical documentary about the Ethiopian victory over Italian troops at the battle of Adwa in March 1896, which ended the first Italo-Ethiopian war. Gerima screened *Adwa* at the Venice Film Festival; its reframing of history through the director's national lens, and unsparing exposure of Italian brutality, offended local sensibilities. "People stormed out," he recalls. "Here was an Ethiopian history coming, and it ruined their ideas. Italians always say to me, 'We built roads, we built clinics and hospitals, we weren't as cruel as other colonialists,' and I would say 'Oh no, I remember my father's book!'"

Gerima's father was his first conduit to a life in art, and to the liberationist, anti-colonial politics that would definitively cut him off from the mainstream. When Haile moved from Ethiopia to Chicago in 1967 he attended drama school, studied as a playwright, and acted in his father's plays. It was at UCLA, however, that he developed his filmmaking skills. He made a pair of ruminative, dreamlike shorts which filtered black liberation struggles through the consciousness of a college basketball player (*Hour Glass*, 1971) and an imprisoned woman (*Child of Resistance*, 1972) before his first feature, the staggering *Bush Mama* (1975). This blend of vérité-style docudrama and Brechtian agitprop centres on a black welfare recipient (the charismatic Barbara O. Jones) and her broken family, surviving in LA's impoverished Watts district. Its opening credits give away Gerima's intentions: rather than "directed by", a scrawled legend reads "Answerable: Haile Gerima, 1975".

While unquestionably relevant in the era of Black Lives Matter and student protests at the University of Missouri, *Bush Mama* was produced in a tinderbox political context (Vietnam, racism, colonialism) that had a profound impact on the filmmaking of Gerima and his colleagues: "In the early 1970s there was a rainbow of people who had been casualties of racist cinema, who wanted to counter-measure," he says. He cites as influences filmmakers such as Jorge Sanjinés from Bolivia, Glauber Rocha and the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* movement, Miguel Littín of Chile,



**Concerning violence:** Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993) gave him the money to open his video and bookstore

and Fernando Solanas of Argentina. "Their films mediated our ambiguous relationship to cinema; saying, 'Yes, it can be used against itself.' The fact that cinema was a perpetrator of imperialism created a very ambiguous relationship for me. I wanted to use film against its own established legacy of what it had been doing to non-white people. This came down to the idea of intensely questioning the cinematic grammar itself."

Another huge influence was the great Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène: "When I saw [Sembène's 1963 debut] *Borom Sarret*," he says, "I thought, 'Oh, I can make an Ethiopian film! It doesn't need to have an English script.' English is a very imperial language... you feel like all your characters have to speak it to be in a movie. I saw Sembène's film, and that very same night I stopped writing my next movie *Harvest: 3,000 Years* in English and started writing it in Amharic." Filmed in Ethiopia in the aftermath of the overthrow of emperor Haile Selassie, this stunning monochrome drama chronicles a peasant family toiling under the scornful eye of a wealthy landowner. Alongside Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1977), Larry Clark's *Passing Through* (1977), Julie Dash's *Illusions* (1982) and Billy Woodberry's *Bless Their Little Hearts* (1983), it's one of the high points of the 'LA Rebellion'.

That term was retrospectively coined by the African-American historian Clyde Taylor in 1986.



***Bush Mama* (1975)**

Gerima is not overly fond of it: "It's not truthful," he says. "The very people who endorse this movement now rejected it when it happened – the establishment negated and undermined every innovative form we stumbled through, like jazz." Intriguingly, though the Rebellion is regarded as a black movement – a recent Tate Britain retrospective was entitled 'LA Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema' – Gerima is sceptical of that notion too: "Initially it had Latin Americans, Asian students, and even some white kids who were into this idea of a cinema of liberation. But then, typical of the black bourgeoisie in America – and the pitfalls of black nationalism – it was excised from its historical context to make it a 'black' phenomena because America deals in race relations only." He continues, "I had more identification with a Brazilian filmmaker who I did not even like as a person, but he was a proponent of the liberationist cinema we were all thinking of." (By contrast, Jan-Christopher Horak, director of the UCLA Film & Television Archive and mastermind of the ongoing LA Rebellion restoration project, has written: "I believe the name is not only historically justified, but accurate ... To ignore the specific cultural and political context of post-Watts Black America would do an injustice to all African and African-American filmmakers at UCLA.")

Gerima is circumspect yet piercingly honest about why the UCLA school of filmmakers have not enjoyed the careers their talents should have ensured: "We could not sustain a communal, collective coexistence beyond our school days, and that has impacted on all of us. Also, we were naive on the business aspect. We were alienated from the ugly culture of capitalism, but we never converted a socialist business idea, to co-produce each other's movies, to co-exist, in a very formidable way; it's a shame." Gerima recently took to the website Indiegogo to fund a new feature (*Yetut Lij*), but fell well short of his ambitious \$500,000 goal. Finding funding may not get easier as the years go by, but Gerima keeps busy, and remains an inspiration for all advocates of liberationist cinema. ☺



# VODOU HISTORIES

For 16 years the photographer and documentary maker Leah Gordon has been recording Haitian life, music and carnival culture

By Sam Davies

In its simplicity, *Bounda pa Bounda: a drag zaka*, the last of the three films collected in *Iron in the Soul: the Haiti Documentary Films of Leah Gordon*, could almost be a formal exercise. Shot in 2008, it consists of an extended take which makes the viewer wait and watch, watch and wait, before a final riotous pay-off. The eponymous star, Bounda pa Bounda, is the leader of a rara group – the bands that play in processions between Mardi Gras and Easter – and Gordon's camera, with a patience that echoes a Warhol screen test, studies him in a vodou altar space as he prepares for a performance. Rara music is a constant negotiation between anarchy and organisation. Groups typically feature marching drums, maracas, scrapers and improvised horn sections, the instruments often salvaged plastic or metal drainpipes which play a single note (so that even the most basic riff needs players to alternate and interlock).

But to begin with none of this is heard: Bounda pa Bounda is in the quiet of a sanctuary as he patiently applies lipstick, eye-shadow and glitter. An elaborate headscarf is tied and retied, and the enormous pink bustle of his gown adjusted and fussed over. Ambient noise gradually leaks in – the shouts, murmurs and steady build-up of performers warming up. Sticks clatter and one-note rhythms ripple through the space. His metamorphosis complete, Bounda pa Bounda emerges into the daylight, a butterfly in work-boots, and his group lets rip as he stamps, dances and sprays them with a fine mist of cane spirit in benediction. Gordon's film cuts off at this point, but the performance has only just begun: rara bands often march for hours, gathering followers as they go and, fuelled by spirits, can cover miles on their wayward progressions.

By contrast, music makes mostly fleeting background appearances in *A Pig's Tale*, a documentary that Gordon co-directed with Anne Parisio for Channel 4 in 1997 – but it still rings in the ears. In the early 1980s, faced by a threat from the US to withdraw aid, Haiti's then-ruler, Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier agreed to exterminate the native Creole pig population. The stated intention was to eradicate disease, though this was against a background of intensive lobbying from the American pork industry. The resulting cull left thousands of Haitians worse off; a valuable source of income was lost, while the native pigs were replaced by American breeds which struggled to adapt to the Haitian climate and, unable to forage, required crippling expensive feed. Gordon follows two protagonists. Juste is a Haitian rasta who grew up in Brooklyn: returning to the island to investigate the story of a local who tried to preserve the Creole breed, he finds himself shut out, mistaken for prying officialdom. Edgar is a Vodou priest with a conundrum of his own: years after the cull it is harder and harder to find the true Creole pigs his ceremonies require.



A butterfly in work-boots: Bounda pa Bounda in a photo from Leah Gordon's book *Kanaval* (2010)

But when he does find one, sacrificing it will only help to make them the scarcer. Instead of music, the soundtrack is screaming livestock.

Music has never been a major export for Haiti – unlike several of its near neighbours, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Cuba. Unlike reggae or salsa, Haitian musical subcultures – twoubadou, compas, mini-jazz, rara – barely raise a flicker of recognition. The London-based record label Soul Jazz has a history with Haitian music, though, from which their move into film, with *Iron in the Soul*, is an organic development. Since the millennium they've released an album of rara music as well as two remarkable

*A TV travel report warned viewers not to go to Haiti by mistake. Gordon booked a ticket immediately*

albums documenting the sound of Vodou ritual drumming – Leah Gordon's photography provided stunning cover imagery for one of them. Gordon's interest in Haiti began with a television travel report hymning the wonders of the Dominican Republic, which ended by saying that it shared its island with Haiti, a



Eugène, one of the artists in *Atis Rezistans*



'Lanse kod' – rope throwers – from *Kanaval*



nation of vodou, death, dictatorship and military coups, and warning viewers not to go there by mistake. Gordon booked a ticket immediately: her work as a photographer, filmmaker and curator has been closely tied with Haiti's culture, conflicts and paradoxes ever since.

In 2010 Soul Jazz published Gordon's *Kanaval: Vodou, Politics and Revolution on the Streets of Haiti*, which collected her photographs of carnival dancers in Jacmel, on Haiti's south coast. Shot in black-and-white on a mid-century Rolleicord twin-lens reflex camera, these images were astonishing. Haitian carnival is far more confrontational than the celebrations found elsewhere in the Caribbean: it is a space in which to resurrect suppressed histories of slavery and dictatorship and confront the political present. Dancers cross-dress, assembling grotesque costumes and masks from bed sheets, cow horns, or dismembered toys. The effect is stark, surreal and deliberately disturbing. Gordon's framing of it makes for a fascinating still companion piece to *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, the film assembled by Maya Deren's husband Teiji Ito after her death, from footage she shot of Haitian ritual dancers in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Frustratingly, Gordon's film work lacks the eye for framing and contrast her still photography demonstrates. The relatively flattening effects of video and digital compared with analogue film may not help. But the intense inventive energy of the carnival costumes in Jacmel is captured in *Atis Rezistans: The Sculptors of Grand Rue* (2008), the second film on *Iron in the Soul*. Profiling a loose artistic collective living and working at the southern end of Grand Rue, Port-au-Prince's main thoroughfare, it's the one film of the three that looks forward, rather than documenting tradition or history. As the artists Celeur, Eugène, Claude and Guyodo speak to camera about their work they are surrounded by visual and sonic clutter, sounds from the street and other workshops bleeding in at the edges. Using junk and found objects they create sculptural collages – mechanical artefacts that could be props for a never-made Vodou science fiction film. Like the Jacmel dancers and Bounda pa Bounda, the group are using what comes to hand to transform and transmute their surroundings. But they're also feeling their way towards something new, something which begins to collapse the distance between folk art and the futuristic. 📍

**i** The DVD *Iron in the Soul: the Haiti Documentary Films of Leah Gordon* is released by Soul Jazz Records



A lanse kod group, Kouvrey, from *Kanaval*

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

A three-year project is revealing the extraordinary, untidy beginnings of the talkies in Britain



By Geoff Brown

The producer and director John F. Argyle is not considered an important figure in British film history, unless you have a special fondness for Bela Lugosi drowning people in *The Dark Eyes of London* (1939). But maybe his stock should stand rather higher: for in September 1931 Argyle directed Britain's last authentic silent feature, *The Final Reckoning* – a 65-minute colliery drama with love trimmings, filmed in glorious Tamworth in Staffordshire, Argyle's home town.

Practicalities more than reverence for silent cinema aesthetics kept Argyle mute. He was young, starting out, and had no access to sound facilities. His studio base consisted chiefly of large rooms in Tamworth hotels. Not that the major companies around London were having a much easier time – something that is steadily becoming clearer as work advances on a three-year group research programme, British Silent Cinema and the Transition to Sound 1927-1933, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and based at De Montfort University and the University of Stirling.

Laraine Porter and I (respectively, principal investigator and chief researcher) presented some of our particular findings at the recent British Silent Film Festival in Leicester – though every week of research unearths further information, shedding new light on an important but tangled and under-explored period. Among the revelations, a declaration in 1928 that seaweed was an essential ingredient in conquering auditorium echoes, packed into quilts lining the rear of the stalls.

My eyebrows shot up even higher reading David Cunyngame's diary for 1929, which is lodged at BFI Special Collections. That summer Cunyngame – subsequently a skilled production manager for Korda – worked at Elstree, in the sound department at British International Pictures, the company that was the powerhouse of the industry's sound revolution. He offers a sometimes withering account of chaos and poor leadership, of recording sessions interrupted by aeroplanes, twittering birds, squabbles over microphone placement, faulty rheostats, a bawling baby and squeaky shoes. Above all, they suffered equipment breakdown – partly because RCA Photophone's expensive apparatus was hauled daily from one part of BIP to another, for night-time shooting in spaces not yet converted for sound. No wonder *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Cunyngame's main headache, trundled on for more than eight weeks, long after 22 June, when Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (advertised as a "100% talkie", though it's more like 68%) had a triumphant trade showing.

*Some silents were injected with small doses of talk – called the 'goat gland' treatment*



Headache: *Under the Greenwood Tree*

Alongside studio renovations and unfamiliar equipment, companies faced the question of what to do about the many silent features finished or in progress during the winter of 1928-29, when British industry executives, pushed by the London success of Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool*, finally accepted that they must make talkies of their own. Little aesthetic or economic good was achieved by injecting these stragglers with small doses of talk – called the 'goat gland' treatment, after a quack cure for male impotence. The studios pressed on just the same.

Not all of Britain's surgically altered silents survive for study. Who last saw Gaumont's *The Devil's Maze* – featuring hunting scenes and a stillborn baby – which was titivated in August 1929 after the actress Trilby Clark, initially declared missing, was tracked down to the south of France and yanked back to face the mike? Will I ever set eyes on BIP's *The Plaything*, named by the *Daily Express* as one of the two worst British films of the year?

Still, we can certainly check out *Such Is the Law*, the most radical goat-glander of them all, belatedly produced in 1930 by the Stoll company at Cricklewood, a studio especially slow to convert to sound. The apparatus finally installed was Visatone – British, cheap, good quality, based on Marconi patents. By September Sinclair Hill and cohorts had carved out two reels from *The Price of Divorce*, an unreleased 1928 silent film, concocted a wraparound talking narrative, and blended the two elements into a domestic morality drama wishfully described in publicity as something "ultra-modern". The silent material unfolds as a flashback, draped with voiceover narration. The result holds much technical interest, though it's hard to care about the characters' problems – something it has in common with other talkies that line up actors on a sofa and let the polite vowels roll.

The ingenious *Such Is the Law* scraped by at the box office in 1931, but results were not so rosy for the last batch of Argyle silents, trade-shown in March 1932 with synchronised music. Reviewing another of them, *Thoroughbred*, the *Era* reviewer blinked amusedly at the film's old-fashioned ways and quaint subtitles. His parting shot was: "Obviously a picture for the 'unintelligentsia.'" The bell had tolled, the caravan had moved on. Even if shoes squeaked and the rheostat failed, there was now no turning back. 📍



# LITTLE BIG MAN

Gigantism rules the cinematic landscape, but Peter Tscherkassky's tiny, exquisitely crafted dreams are a ravishing anomaly

**By Neil Young**

The Nicaraguan flyweight Román 'Chocolatito' González may not be the biggest or most famous fighter around, but he is currently rated – pound-for-pound – the world's best boxer. Similarly, the Austrian filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky isn't even the most prominent director from Vienna; but he has a sound claim to the title of the world's greatest active filmmaker – shot-for-shot, second-for-second, frame-for-frame.

The 57-year-old's filmography over the last two decades consists of nine shorts totalling just 97 minutes. But he has amassed dozens of prizes and critical hosannas for found-footage spectacles that are now widely acknowledged as masterpieces: *Outer Space* (1999) and *Instructions for a Light and Sound Machine* (2005) both featured in this magazine's best-of-all-time poll in 2012; early indications are that *The Exquisite Corpus*, which premiered at Cannes in May, will join them when the next poll comes around in 2022.

Tscherkassky's extracurricular contributions to cinema are just as noteworthy. He co-founded sixpackfilm, the Vienna collective that has been an astonishingly successful force in the promotion of Austrian experimental. sixpackfilm co-published *Film Unframed: A History of Austrian Avant-Garde Cinema* (2012), which Tscherkassky edited, combining aesthetic appeal with academic rigour, informative practicality and non-obfuscatory prose.

The book reflects Tscherkassky's craftsmanship. He spends years on his films, exposing raw 35mm stock a metre at a time on his workbench using laser-pointers, maskings and small torches. The resulting monochrome provocations manipulate and distort existing footage, often from well-known sources, so that they assault eye and ear with rapid-fire imagery and harshly cacophonous audio – though not always: for *The Exquisite Corpus* Dirk Schaefer created a delicate score, half Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's *Meshe of the Afternoon*, half 'Sailing By', for the various dream-zones Tscherkassky navigates.

*The Exquisite Corpus* gradually unleashes a frenzy, as examples of softcore erotica (plus glimpses of an oyster-scoffing Joyce Redman from Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones*) are blended into an orgiastic celebration of the human body. This is the first time Tscherkassky has worked with what some call 'pornography' – although both *Outer Space* and its successors *Get Ready* (1999) and *Dream Work* (2001) were derived from Sidney J. Furie's sexually charged poltergeist thriller *The Entity* (1981).

At Cannes, the film dazzled the handful of critics who defied the red carpet's pull to investigate the Directors' Fortnight Short Film Corner. *The Exquisite Corpus* has since won Best Short at Chicago and played to appreciative reactions at the London Film Festival – part of a global tour that has already taken in Melbourne, Mar del Plata in Argentina and Ulaanbaatar



**Blue mood:** *The Exquisite Corpus*, not so much depicting sex as conjuring the feel of it


in Mongolia, often accompanied by a selected retrospective of Tscherkassky's own uniquely exquisite corpus. Shorts are usually pushed to the margins of exhibition, but Tscherkassky is among the luckier examples of those who – like Borges, Carver and Chekhov in literature – adhere to the 'small is beautiful' principle.

His films benefit from the remarkable funding mechanisms that have allowed Austrian avant-garde cinema – illustrious forebears such as Peter Kubelka and Kurt Kren, amongst many others – to flourish over the last 60 years. In this world, in which feature-length works have always been an exception, Tscherkassky stands out for the way he bridges the gulf between experimental and narrative realms. In comparison with the obscurantisms and abstractions that most maestros of the non-commercial cinema favour, Tscherkassky is accessible. As he recently remarked, "All of my films are somehow narrative. Small little narratives – *something* is going on, which really helps. It helps in terms of my production and it helps the audience watching the film, there's a certain progression." While his films showcase multi-layered visuals of near-infinite complexity, their structures are simple. As the Austrian critic Christoph Huber has noted,

*This is peak Tscherkassky: a percussive extremity that overwhelms the spectator with virtuoso editing and composition*

"Regardless of timbre and approach, the persuasive power of the work stems from its conceptual clarity... His films are essentially self-explanatory."

*The Exquisite Corpus* – its title a not-so-helpful reference to the surrealist game of Consequences *Cadavre exquis* – is in some ways a quintessential Tscherkassky work. The narrative framework is basic: we see a nudist couple sailing a boat around what looks like Greek islands; they reach the shore, where a young woman sleeps; her dreams are visualised; she awakes. Countless avant-garde films conjure dream-worlds, but surprisingly few have framed their content as explicitly as Tscherkassky does here – perhaps none since Edwin S. Porter's seven-minute quasi-experimental comedy *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (1906).

But for Tscherkassky, the oneiric is, here as in *Dream Work*, essentially a pretext for what gradually becomes an exhilarating bombardment of images – delivered at such speed that one can't tell whether actual penetration, fellatio and cunnilingus are being shown; only careful freeze-framing reveals occasional explicitness. *The Exquisite Corpus* is, however, more about conjuring the *mood* of sex – its focused physicality, the joyously violent bond between two individuals – than specific images. This is peak Tscherkassky: a percussive extremity that overwhelms the spectator with virtuoso editing and composition, defying verbal or intellectual analysis, gloriously climaxing in one sensual, irresistible rush. We're happily pummelled into submission: it's a knock-out. 



# A WORLD APART



Only the lonely: Alessio Rigo de Righi and Matteo Zoppis's portrait of a cave-dwelling hermit, *Il Solengo*

While Doclisboa took on questions of connection to and isolation from the world, its main prize went to a film about a hermit

By Giovanni Vimercati

*"Cinema punctures the human skin of things, the derm of reality. It exalts matter and makes it appear to us in its relationship with the mind from which it emerges."* Antonin Artaud

In a navel-gazing festival world, Doclisboa – Lisbon's festival of documentary film – is striving to maintain the umbilical cord that connects cinema to the universe outside. Despite further cuts to its budget, the festival, now in its 13th edition, continues to promote an idea of cinema as a site of elaboration and continuation of the world at large; and the way it embraces its visitors makes a pleasant change from the snobbery characteristic of the festival circuit. But it is precisely because of its anti-elitist stance that the decision to isolate the festival from any kind of market activity feels incongruous. Festivals and films, however radical, cannot exist in a vacuum; and their place is determined by economic factors which, used cleverly, could broaden Doclisboa's audience, bringing in those not privileged to attend the festival – the stimulating exuberance of its programming begs to be shared.

This year the festival exhumed two of the greatest humanists of world cinema (a dying breed indeed): Billy Woodberry, a leading light of the LA Rebellion, and the Anglo-American experimentalist Stephen Dwoskin. Dwoskin, who died in 2012, returned in *Before the Beginning*, while Woodberry broke a 30-year silence with

*And When I Die, I Won't Stay Dead*, both of which received their world premieres in the 'Risks' section, curated by the veteran Portuguese film critic Augusto M. Seabra. Dwoskin started making *Before the Beginning* in 2004 with his colleague and friend Boris Lehman. It is an intimate act of reconnaissance in preparation for a film that was never made. In this cine-missive from the afterlife, they share their embryonic ideas and frailties, unrealised intents and filmed memories. A collage of preliminary notes, rehearsals and desultory drafts, Dwoskin's and Lehman's film exudes an impalpable eloquence, hidden away in the most insignificant gestures. Like many of Dwoskin's films, *Before the Beginning* is at once transient and profound – a film, moreover, that we can only imagine, since it exists in several indefinite versions and we will never see it completed.

*Doclisboa's isolation from any kind of market activity feels incongruous. Festivals and films cannot exist in a vacuum*



Bob Kaufman in *And When I Die...*

Thirty years after *Bless Their Little Hearts*, one of the late masterpieces of the pan-African-American wave that had its creative epicentre at UCLA, Woodberry has re-emerged – from where remains unclear – with *And When I Die, I Won't Stay Dead*, a documentary about the Beat poet Bob Kaufman. Kaufman's largely oral poetry never got the same shelf-room as Ginsberg or Ferlinghetti, and it is his lesser notoriety that is the investigative core of this documentary. He was not only black and Jewish – already enough to explain his failure to become as famous as his peers – but had been active in the last militant phase of the workers' movement in America, before McCarthy's purges and Hoover's iron fist erased it even from national memory; he arrived in San Francisco's North Beach having already lived a life worth living. But even time has not turned him into a marketable Beat icon.

The award for best international film was won by *Il Solengo*, by the Italian-American partnership of Alessio Rigo de Righi and Matteo Zoppis. Many films are made about the supposed idyll of rural life; *Il Solengo* – roughly, 'the loner' – a probing and calmly unnerving inversion of the genre. The protagonist, Mario de Marcella, remains unseen, but is described through the stories of his neighbours. Living in a cave in the mountains outside Rome, 'the loner' inhabits the dark recesses of the valleys, and of the subconscious of those around him. The directors show considerable talent in capturing the undercurrents of a natural landscape; the picture they give, in all its sinister intricacy, is far removed from the simplified rendition we often get on screen. In keeping with the landscape, the stories we hear about 'the loner' are burdened by a sense of verbal inadequacy – like something we are not really supposed to listen to, let alone fully grasp. 📍



"Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov's stark, stealthy social-realist drama traps viewers in what turns out to be a precisely paced, nightmarish thriller... a tough, gripping watch."

Aaron Hillis, THE VILLAGE VOICE

A FILM BY KRISTINA GROZEVA AND PETAR VALCHANOV

# THE LESSON



IN CINEMAS DECEMBER 4



new wave films

[www.newwavefilms.co.uk](http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk)

MEDIA EUROPE LOVES CINEMA



## CONGRATULATIONS TO ARABIAN NIGHTS AND CEMETERY OF SPLENDOUR

FOR TOP TEN SIGHT & SOUND 2015

MUBI

new wave films

COMING SOON 2016



# Reviews



## 77 **By the Sea**

*It's hard to remember the last wide-release American film that featured sex so omnipresently, not as dramatic incident but as texture — here, it's Jolie Pitt putting herself on display, at times boringly and at times confrontationally*



**68** Films of the month



**74** Films



**94** Home Cinema



**104** Books





Much of a mulchness: everything in *The Forbidden Room* is designed to evoke the genre conventions of the silent era and 1930s 'programme-picture' talkies'

## The Forbidden Room

Canada/France 2015

Director: Guy Maddin

Certificate 12A 119m 14s

See Feature  
on page 28

### Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Writing a synopsis of *The Forbidden Room* (see box, right) is a fool's game. The film is so crammed with characters and incidents that any 250-word

synopsis has to leave out a lot. For example, there was no space here to mention the storyline about the Janus bust and the doppelganger who turns into the demonic Lug Lug, or to note Charlotte Rampling's fleeting cameos as 'The Ostler's Mother', much less the boy soldiers, the Birthday Penthouse or the squid theft. But the real reason that writing a synopsis is silly is that the film's relentless profusion is its whole point.

*The Forbidden Room* is a seemingly non-stop barrage of story fragments, occasionally 'nested', as in *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965), more often colliding or morphing into each other. Some images look like scratched and buckled 35mm, others use digital manipulation to simulate the effect of nitrate decay and damage or to create swirling montages within the frame. Captions and title-cards sometimes appear in different typefaces in quick succession, as if variant print

sources have been spliced together; a couple of captions and one roller-title are in Spanish. Some dialogue is spoken, but other lines appear as intertitles; a few episodes have both spoken dialogue and intertitles, like some part-talkies of the late 1920s. In one episode, occidental characters have anomalous Chinese names, spelt in modern *pinyin* transliterations. Everything from the melodramatic acting styles to the muted colours (they're deliberately redolent of tinted monochrome and early two-strip Technicolor) is designed to evoke genre conventions of the silent era and 'programme-picture' talkies of the 1930s.

Batman Maddin and his new boy wonder Evan Johnson, credited as co-writers and co-directors, have discussed the film's weird genesis in interviews, most comprehensively in the spring 2015 issue (#62) of the Canadian magazine *Cinema Scope*. (The core of the backstory is also laid out in the press notes, but since most reviewers won't bother to relay it to their readers, Maddin must be intensely relaxed about viewers approaching the film as a thrill-ride experience.) In brief, the project has its roots in a 2010 commission to produce a series of installations for the opening of the Lightbox in Toronto. The 11 looped short films were called *Hauntings* and each was at least notionally inspired by some lost film of the 20s or 30s. Maddin was working on his own *Keyhole* at the time, so enlisted his former student Johnson (then working in a carpet-

cleaning-fluid factory) to supervise the project, and hired "a bunch of talented young filmmakers I'd met on my travels" to shoot the actual films. In 2012, *Hauntings* evolved into a new project to shoot more such 'tributes' to lost films in galleries in Paris and Montreal, where audiences were invited to watch the proceedings. This time Maddin directed them himself and promoted Johnson to the role of co-director. Maddin settled on the title *Seances* for the new shorts; he plans to publish them on an interactive website in 2016.

The initial filming for *The Forbidden Room* took place alongside *Seances*, but Maddin claims that this material was always distinct from the shorts and intended specifically for the cinema,



Under the volcano: *The Forbidden Room*





## Maddin and Johnson may be lamenting the fragility and transience of the medium, but they're also into the trashiness of trash culture

from Murnau's *Der Januskopf* (1920, a version of the Jekyll and Hyde story) and Naruse's *The Strength of a Moustache* (*Hige no Chikara*, 1931) to long-forgotten Hollywood genre films and early talkie serials. The framing material, in which Maddin regular Louis Negin performs a monologue written by the poet John Ashbery on bath-time etiquette, was suggested by a lost 1937 short by Dwain Esper, *How to Take a Bath*. (Esper's original featured two contrasted women; this features an unprepossessing male hippie.)

But the disparate sources of inspiration are actually far less varied than you might expect, since everything is mulched down into the flow of treated images and dramatic clichés: it's all intentionally much of a muchness. The Paris surrealists were the first to champion 'pulp poetry', perceiving that pop entertainments sometimes climbed to heights of delirium, and Maddin follows their example – but without their anti-bourgeois edge. He obliquely references Buñuel's first two films (the absurd title-card "17 months later" could have come from *Un chien andalou* and the patently symbolic "Minister of the Interior" has strayed in from *L'Age d'or*), but he shies away from Buñuel's Sadean blasphemy. His Christ-figure is Roy Dupuis's heroic Cesare, who spends much of the movie trying to rescue Clara Furey's amnesiac damsel in distress and ultimately starts summoning disciples to help

him: more Sunday school than devil in disguise.

To their credit, though, Maddin and Johnson deny us the easy satisfaction of stories with proper endings and dramatic closure. They may be conjuring vanished films back into life, and lamenting the fragility and transience of the medium that sired them, but they're also into the trashiness of trash culture: the shoddiness of B-movie effects, overripe ham performances and the kind of tacky glamour that floated Jack Smith's boat when he made *Flaming Creatures* (1963). Maddin has long been a brilliant pasticheur of antique film language (the short *Heart of the World*, 2000, a feverish tribute to Soviet-style montage, remains his masterpiece), but his sense of absurdity always trumps everything else. So the many storylines in *The Forbidden Room* are all left unresolved, stripped of their emotional punchlines. Instead, towards the end, a *Book of Climaxes* is proffered, ushering in a mini-portmanteau of pyrotechnic endings: a collision of airships, an island shaped like a human brain exploding and so on. Maybe this was the volume left on the cutting-room floor of Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), another grandstanding piece of digitally engineered cinema? After that, the closing scenes – including the long-delayed entry into the forbidden room, the captain's cabin on a stricken submarine – are knowingly bathetic and inconsequential.

As always in Maddin films, the presiding spirit is camp and crypto-gay, a colouring underlined by the presence of such actors as Udo Kier. The storylines, however, emphasise loss, bereavement, amnesia and injury, echoing the fate of the original lost films themselves. The melodramatic fragments here have little or no emotional kick, but the film as a whole delivers a febrile melancholia with gusto. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Co-director

Evan Johnson

#### Producers

Phyllis Laing  
Guy Maddin  
Phoebe Greenberg  
Penny Mancuso  
for NFB:

David Christensen

#### Written by

Guy Maddin

Evan Johnson

Robert Kotyk

#### 'How to Take a Bath' Written by

John Ashbery

#### Director of Photography

Stéphane

Weber-Biron

#### Film Editor

John Gurdebeke

#### Production Designer

Galen Johnson

#### Sound Designer

John Gurdebeke

#### Costume Designers

Yso South

Élodie Mard

Julie Charland

@Cinema Atelier

Tovar 2012 Inc.,

Turbid Pictures Inc.

and the National Film

Board of Canada

#### Production Companies

Phi Films presents a

Phi Films and

Buffalo Gal Pictures

production in

co-production with

the National Film

Board of Canada

Produced in

association with

Phi Centre, Georges

Pompidou National

Public Cultural

Establishment

and KIDAM

Produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada and with financial investment from Manitoba Film & Music and SODEC Société de développement des entreprises culturelles – Québec

#### Executive Producers

David Christensen

Niv Fichman

Jody Shapiro

François-Pierre Clavel

#### Cast

Louis Negin

Graham Ashmore

Angela La Muse

Senyshyn

Kimmi Melnychuk

Charlotte Rampling

Alex Bisping

Gregory Hlady  
Kent McQuaid  
Roy Dupuis  
Melissa Trainor  
Kyle Gatehouse  
Victor Andrés  
Trelles Turgeon  
Clara Furey  
Neil Napier  
Noel Burton  
Marie Brassard  
Darcy Fehr  
Pamela Ivetta  
Catherine Treskow  
Udo Kier  
Geraldine Chaplin  
André Wilms  
Romano Orzari  
Céline Bonnier  
Slimane Dazi  
Jacques Nolot  
Caroline Dhavernas  
Paul Ahmarani  
Judith Baribeau  
Victoria Diamond  
Mistaya Hemingway

Mathilda Ekoe  
Lewis Furey  
Éric Robidoux  
Karine Vanasse  
Sienna Mazzone  
Kathia Rock  
John Churchill  
Matthew Comeau  
Alexandre Skeret  
Sherpa Macilic  
Mathieu Amalric  
Jean-François  
Stévenin  
Amira Casar  
Vasco Bailly-Gentaud  
Maria de Medeiros  
Christophe Pao  
Miguel Cueva  
Andreas Aperijs  
Ariane Labed  
Sophie Desmarais  
Arthur Holden  
Adèle Haenel  
Marie-Sophie Roy  
Anthony Lemke

Victoire Dubois  
Elina Löwensohn  
Kim Morgan  
Luce Vigo

In Colour and  
Black and White

Distributor  
Soda Pictures

not the internet. But he also says that he was dispirited by the raw video footage ("looking through the viewfinder when shooting this and seeing some butt-ugly video, it was hard to get my attitude up") and persevered only on Johnson's assurance that the material could be tweaked in post-production. Tweaked it certainly was: there is hardly a single shot in the whole two hours (or in the 130-minute version screened in Berlin and Hong Kong festivals) which hasn't been digitally transformed. Johnson won't divulge exactly how he engineered the impressive image-morphing effects ("the technique is similar to data-moshing... it's an Adobe After Effects series of techniques that I accidentally put together"), but they power a visual phantasmagoria with a built-in propulsive energy. There were reportedly mass walkouts at the Sundance premiere last January, so clearly not everyone is seduced. But anyone who's enjoyed a Guy Maddin film before will take it in their stride and find much to like, even if the pleasure is inextricable from the pain of unyielding surface 'noise' and the Maddin-ing aesthetic which remains convinced that schlock-melodrama clichés contain germs of beauty and psychological truth.

The film takes its title from a lost Allan Dwan three-reeler of 1914 (a madwoman-locked-in-the-attic story; Lon Chaney was in a supporting role) and bases its main story fragments on the titles of a wide range of other lost movies,

**Motto:** "Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost" (John, 6:12). An extended collage of fragmentary storylines, each of them notionally inspired by a lost film from the silent and early-talkie periods. A sinisterly jolly man lectures the viewer on the protocols of taking a bath. Four sailors in a stricken submarine cannot risk surfacing in case a mysterious jelly explodes; their captain remains locked in his room. Cesare, a sodden stranger also known as Sapling Jack, enters the sub through a hatch; he recalls that he was trying to rescue Margot, kidnapped by a feral gang known as the Red Wolves in the snowy forest of Holstein-Schleswig. The amnesiac Margot dreams that she is singing about the aswang, a jungle vampire, at a decadent party.

Baron Pappenheim, his cupboard stripped bare by a thief, unwittingly hires an escaped convict as his new gardener. Gong breaks 47 bones when her motorcycle crashes; she falls in love with Dr Deng at the Oracle Bones Hospital, but loses him to the skull-faced man and his crew of skeletal insurance defrauders. Desperate aristocrat Thad shoots his butler and tries to steal his identity in a bid to hide his own crimes. The dead butler repeatedly returns to his family to say goodbye. Cesare summons three gifted male disciples and comes upon 'The Book of Climaxes', in which stories reach cataclysmic endings. On the submarine, Cesare enters the forbidden room and finds the captain's daughter. The lecture on bathing protocols wraps up.



## The Hunger Games Mockingjay Part 2

USA/Germany 2015, Director: Francis Lawrence  
Certificate 12A 136m 45s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 76th Hunger Games." Although there are no literal games in this fourth film in the series – only a war that draws on their ingenious violence – such is the potency of Suzanne Collins's mythology that it seems possible it has been around for three-quarters of a century. In fact, it's only seven years since her first *Hunger Games* novel was published in 2008, the year of the global crash. As Noreena Hertz observed last April when she named them Generation K, for young millennial women *Hunger Games* heroine Katniss Everdeen is a defining figure. Born into poverty on the margins of the working class, in a dictatorial society that makes spectacle of brutal blood sport, Katniss is paradigmatic of what Linda Tirado has called "Bootstrap America", one pay cheque from financial crisis.

In this concluding film, which adapts the second half of Collins's third novel, Katniss finally shifts from passive participant to active protagonist. She has survived two iterations of the deadly reality-TV show created by President Snow as both substitute for and terrifying reminder of the civil war that tore the nation of Panem apart, and has spent several months literally underground, promoted as a figurehead of the rebellion against Snow and his 'Peacekeepers'. The film begins with her taking the fight first to Alma Coin, the morally ambiguous rebel leader, and then to the Capitol itself. Her aim is pure revenge: despite all the horrors visited on her, it is Snow's brainwashing of her Games teammate Peeta that finally pushes Katniss into action. A reluctant soldier, she questions the violent intentions of the rebels, particularly the weaponry designed by her former boyfriend Gale with Q-like scientist Beetee.

The equivalence of the corrupt government and the rebel leadership is central to understanding Katniss's actions in the final book, which the filmmakers have adapted rigorously in terms of its Games-style set pieces – notably the eerie subterranean attack by mutants that forms the movie's centrepiece – and its less cinematic character arcs. The novel trilogy hinges on Katniss's first-person narration, which is dominated in the final half of the third book by her experience of pain both physical – she is strangled, shot and burned – and psychological. Although the film opens with a severely bruised Katniss croaking out her key line – "My name is Katniss Everdeen" – it is in the concluding section of the story that it struggles most to convey the emotion of that first-person voice, and needs it most. There are frequent close-ups that showcase Jennifer Lawrence's extraordinary expressiveness; like Katniss for the rebels, Lawrence is the film's figurehead, not only its protagonist but also bearing the entire burden of representing its narrative.

While supporting turns from Woody Harrelson as wisecracking alcoholic victor Haymitch, Julianne Moore in chilling mode as Alma Coin, Mahershala Ali as solid soldier Boggs and the late Philip Seymour Hoffman as insidious spin doctor Plutarch Heavensbee



War child: Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen

continue to give weight and plausibility to the rebels' underground world, these are more or less cameos in a film whose twin poles are close-ups of Lawrence and thrilling spectacle. The latter includes a perfectly animated tide of liquid metal that chases Katniss and her squad up several storeys of a grand, dilapidated building; the location is reminiscent of post-revolutionary Moscow, a reference the film throws in through its superb production design but can't explore.

There is a pervasive tension in the films (particularly the final two) between their championing of social justice and their shiny wrapping of super-spectacle. Co-adaptor Danny

Strong is also co-creator of hip-hop drama *Empire*, which has commanded record TV audiences in the US through a similar combination of 'Black Lives Matter' chants and soap-operatic plots. As a cultural phenomenon, *The Hunger Games* strikes at the heart of our current political situation: Katniss is a figure of austerity, but she also represents the society of spectacle.

"If we die, let it be for a cause, not a spectacle," says rebel commander Paylor (another splendid cameo, from Patina Miller) as she rouses the rebel troops before they invade the Capitol. But the film, like the rebels, is caught on the horns of the Hunger Games. Like the earlier sequels it feels the need to replicate the spectacle that gave the first novel its title, but at the same time it decries the politics of spectacle repeatedly. Spectacle, we are told, is what the Capitol delivers on its ever-present transparent screens and digital billboards; as ever, repellent TV host Caesar Flickerman (Stanley Tucci) pops up to call Katniss "the girl on fire", this time announcing her apparent death in a gun battle.

Yet spectacle is also what Katniss is engaged in for the rebels: the third film was structured around her shooting propaganda videos, or 'propos', with tattooed Capitol filmmaker-turned-rebel Cressida (an excellent Natalie Dormer). In the fourth film she is again assigned to propaganda on the streets of the Capitol, making films to convince the city to surrender.



Lawrence with Mahershala Ali as Boggs





pet cat. The film shifts to naturalism when Katniss returns to the bombed-out, abandoned District 12 (where she finds the cat), intimating a 'realness' to home and its relationships in contrast to high drama and affairs of state.

Inevitably, an idealised and golden-lit coda of hunting, playing house and raising children with Peeta follows. This final fantasy points to a deep chasm in the novels, as in American politics, between the championing of what Howard Zinn called "a people's history" of collective social movements and an anti-statist, individualist, heteropatriarchal libertarianism. While *The Hunger Games* films' insistence, right up to the final shots, that traumatised soldiers and civilians can survive and heal is laudable, the Marian closing image of Katniss in a flower-sprigged dress accessorised with a baby is laughable. Her exposition to the impassive child is as much – perhaps more – of an unreal spectacle as all the action that has gone before; simply singing her 'Mockingjay' song from the third film would have conveyed her emotions and provided a sense of closure. Instead, Katniss's promise to pass the story of the Hunger Games to the next generation, coupled with her distrust of all government, intimates the possibility of a President Paylor-led government re-establishing the Hunger Games, and thus the franchise. *Panem et circenses* continue to fuel Hollywood and (arguably) also the social status quo, a closed system too massive for even Lawrence's all-conquering Katniss Everdeen to defeat. 🍷

*'The Hunger Games' strikes at the heart of our current political situation: Katniss Everdeen is a figure of austerity, but she also represents the society of spectacle*

Ever cynical and sharply political, Games victor Finnick Odair is spot on when he describes the rebels' mission in the Capitol as the 76th Hunger Games. Given this, it's unsurprising that Peeta has to keep enquiring: "Real or not real?" He's asking about implanted memories from his brainwashing, but he could equally be referring to a war that is controlled by games-makers, and a film where all battles are media extravaganzas. Katniss's most stirring speech, following one of the most timely and resonant scenes, in which a trainful of wounded refugees is surrounded by armed rebels, is itself a televisual stunt.

Real or not real: war, politics, leadership, peace-making, even justice – all are mounted as spectacle within the films. This final movie even forgoes the novel's show trial of President Snow for one snowy, showy conversation between Katniss and her tormentor in his elaborate greenhouse of white roses. It asserts the real only through Katniss's relationships, particularly through shot/reverse-shot exchanges with her comrades, and – in the only highly stylised shot of the film – a whirling 360-degree pan that foregrounds her close relationship with her younger sister Prim, whose place she took in the Games right at the start of the story. The film makes slightly more of Prim's life and death than the book does, giving Katniss her first truly emotional scene when she yells her grief at Prim's impervious

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Nina Jacobson  
Jon Kilik

**Screenplay**  
Peter Craig  
Danny Strong

**Adaptation**  
Suzanne Collins  
Based upon her novel *Mockingjay*

**Director of Photography**  
Jo Williams

**Edited by**  
Alan Edward Bell  
Mark Yoshikawa

**Production Designer**  
Philip Messina

**Music**  
James Newton

**Howard**  
**Supervising Sound Editors/**  
**Re-recording Mixers**

Skip Lievsay  
Jeremy Peirson

**Costume Designer**  
Kurt and Bart

**Visual Effects**  
Double Negative

Weta Digital Limited

**MPC**  
The Embassy

Visual Effects Inc.

Cantina Creative

Iola | VFX

Skulley Effects

Exceptional Minds

**Supervising Stunt**

**Coordinator**

R.A. Rondell

©Lions Gate Films Inc.

**Production Companies**

Lionsgate presents

a Color Force/

Lionsgate production

A co-production

between Seashore

GERI, Inc. and

Studio Babelsberg

**Executive Producers**

Suzanne Collins

Jan Foster

Joe Drake

Allison Shearmur

### Cast

**Jennifer Lawrence**

Katniss Everdeen

**Josh Hutcherson**

Peeta Mellark

**Liam Hemsworth**

Gale Hawthorne

**Woody Harrelson**

Haymitch Abernathy

**Elizabeth Banks**

Effie Trinket

**Julianne Moore**

President Alma Coin

**Philip Seymour Hoffman**

Plutarch Heavensbee

**Jeffrey Wright**

Beetee Latier

**Willow Shields**

Primrose Everdeen

**Sam Claflin**

Finnick Odair

**Jena Malone**

Johanna Mason

**Natalie Dormer**

Cressida

**Stanley Tucci**

Caesar Flickerman

**Donald Sutherland**

President

Coriolanus Snow

**Patina Miller**

Commander Paylor

**Mahershala Ali**

Boggs

**Dolby Atmos/DTS:X**

**In Colour**

**Prints by**

Fotokem

[2.35:1]

**Some screenings presented in 3D**  
3D version:  
136m 44s

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

The nation of Panem, underground District 13. Katniss Everdeen recovers from an assault by Peeta Mellark, her teammate in the Hunger Games, who has been programmed to kill her by Panem's dictator President Snow. Katniss, having previously been used as a figurehead by rebel leader Alma Coin, demands to lead the war against the Capitol. She participates in an attack on the militarised District 2, and later escapes 13 for the Capitol, planning to kill Snow. However, rebel commander Paylor tasks her with making a final propaganda video with a squad led by Coin's right-hand man Boggs, who has a holographic projector that maps 'pods' – Games-based booby traps. As a final piece of propaganda, Coin sends Peeta to join the squad. Boggs is killed when he

triggers a hidden pod, so the squad takes to the sewers, where mutant creatures decimate them. Katniss and her ex-boyfriend Gale forge ahead above ground, disguised as fleeing Capitol citizens. Reaching Snow's palace, Katniss witnesses an aerial bombardment of refugee children and medics in which her sister Prim is killed. Snow resigns. Coin becomes interim president. Katniss is horrified by Coin's desire for revenge on the Capitol, and executes her rather than the dying former president at a public ceremony. Smuggled out of the city, Katniss returns home to District 12, where Peeta and their Games mentor Haymitch join her. They watch Paylor sworn in as president, and Katniss decides that, as Gale observed, she cannot live without Peeta.





Model pupil: Agyness Deyn as Chris Guthrie in Terence Davies's adaptation of the classic 1932 novel by Lewis Grassic Gibbon

## Sunset Song

United Kingdom/Luxembourg 2015

Director: Terence Davies

Certificate 15 135m 42s

See Feature  
on page 32

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

Repetition, going over the same ground, can be a route to originality for a great artist, an auteur, whether it's Monet painting haystacks or Hitchcock putting blondes in danger; but it can also be a sign of creative fatigue. Terence Davies is certainly a great artist, but the signals sent by the repetitions in *Sunset Song* are ambiguous.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon's novel of 1932 is a key work of the Scottish renaissance of the first half of the 20th century. It's rooted in the landscape and rural culture of the Mearns, south of Aberdeen, where Gibbon was brought up, and written partly in Doric, the local dialect (though it's pleasing to discover that it was written in Welwyn Garden City). The central figure is Chris Guthrie, daughter of a crofting family. In the film, she is first seen at school, where a pompous inspector is despairing at the girls' French pronunciation: Chris is called upon by

her teacher to show how it's done. Later, we see her laughing and larking about with a friend as they walk home through the woods, speaking of their ambitions. It's clear that she is intelligent, sensitive and high-spirited, with a bright future ahead. But at home things are not easy: her father is a stern Presbyterian with a temper – when Chris's older brother Will nicknames a horse 'Jehovah', their father is enraged by the blasphemy and beats him. At night, in their shared bedroom, Will talks to Chris of how much he hates him. At night, too, they hear their father's insistence on his conjugal rights and their mother's protests – they have four children already.

Though it differs in detail – of landscape, period, language, accent, religion, music – this is in many ways the same world that Davies explored in *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988), his best-known and, I'd guess, best-loved film: the violent patriarch, the downtrodden wife, the sensitive, defiant son, the charismatic daughter. These figures are the foundations of Davies's art, and to complain about them would be as daft as complaining that Jane Austen seemed awfully preoccupied with the lot of unmarried young women.

All the same, it is hard not to feel a tug of disappointment at the way the relationships are worked out here. Pete Postlethwaite's father

in *Distant Voices*... was a terrifying sadist but he offered a sense of the damage underlying the violence, the knowledge that he too was a victim, even if it was never clear of what. So there was the long moment of trembling before an explosion at the dinner table, and the memorable scene in which, during an air raid, he slapped his daughter and then clutched her to him: his love for his family and his own terror, his own wars, were visible.

John Guthrie, in *Sunset Song*, is a less inflected creature; he has one strikingly tender moment after his wife's death – as her corpse lies on their bed, laid out for burial, he leans over and rearranges her plait on the pillow. But otherwise, hard but fair and a bit screwed up about sex is as deep as this portrayal goes. For the most part, Davies and his editor David Charap move quite briskly from shot to shot, so that it is striking when they linger over anything; one of the first pauses comes when Will is beaten for borrowing his father's gun without permission – a reminder of just how much writers of Gibbon's generation were in thrall to Freud. The undertone of sado-homoeroticism is odd.

The drama of Chris's life with her father takes us through the first third or so of the film. Her mother (Daniela Nardini, warm and affecting in what little screen time she is given) is weighed





*Though it differs in detail – of landscape, period, language, accent, religion – this is much the same world Davies explored in ‘Distant Voices, Still Lives’*

down by his anger, and his demands for sex – the consequences made clear when the doctor in attendance at the birth of her twins eats his boiled egg afterwards with a shaking hand. Finding that she is pregnant again, she poisons herself and her infant twins; Chris’s hopes of an education have to be put aside. Will leaves, bound for Canada, or anywhere else he can escape their father. Then her father has a stroke, and becomes in his helplessness more monstrous than before.

But throughout all this, there is a strain of rapturous lyricism not too far in tone from *Distant Voices...* and *The Long Day Closes* (1992), though here it is inspired by rural landscapes. (Not all of them are in Scotland: making the film was for Davies a Wellesian odyssey that took him to New Zealand and Luxembourg in search of the right conditions, natural and fiscal.) DP Michael McDonough creates some gorgeous pictures of crops and clouds; but much of the work is done by Agyness Deyn, as Chris, through whose eyes the story unfolds. At several points the camera lingers as she contemplates herself in the mirror, letting us feel the weight of her introspection, her uncertainty about the future. Deyn, an ex-model, has the height and slenderness for Gibbon’s boyishly attractive heroine, though in the early scenes she is visibly too old to play a schoolgirl, and from time to time the perfection of her lipstick is a faint distraction. Still, Chris is meant to be a superior being; at the heart of the story is her torn sense that her intellect destines her for better things, while her body and soul are tied to the land and the farm; Deyn gets the ambivalence well. At times she is given chunks of the novel to read in voiceover: the device is not subtle, but Deyn carries it off (to my ears her accent is very creditable, though the judgement should perhaps be left to natives of Aberdeenshire).

After the death of Chris’s father, the story enters a new phase: Chris has the farm, she has her cleverness and strength of character. She hires an older woman to come and live with her, to satisfy local opinion and to free herself of the housework. Deyn radiates a warm private pleasure as she announces these measures. Her courtship with Ewan Tavendale, a young local farmer, offers a rare sense of what romance was like in an isolated community a century ago – the lack of contraception, the shortage of other romantic possibilities, the sense of every action being observed by the whole community – but the film makes it clear that sex could be no less romantic and ecstatic for all that. The tenderness

of Chris and Ewan’s relationship, the joy of youth and sex, and then of childbirth, feel touching and authentic. This is Davies at his best, rapturously caught up in the glamour of ordinary lives.

But in the last 40 minutes or so the film sags badly. The outbreak of war is announced – the first really definite clue to precisely when all this is happening – and suddenly the script goes slack. “Have you seen the casualty list?” someone demands: “Fifty thousand men dead for a few yards of Belgian mud.” Ewan enlists; returning from his training camp, he is angry, coarse and violent. The problem is not that his rage is unrealistic (though Kevin Guthrie shows less conviction than in the earlier romance) but that it is dull. When, inevitably, he dies, Chris’s rage and denial also feel detached, secondhand. Having coped with the wide range of emotional demands so far, Deyn now seems stranded, unable to find any variety in grief. A prolonged flashback to Ewan’s final hours at the front only accentuates the sense of rush and clumsiness – you remember how deftly in *Distant Voices...* Davies wove together past and present, how alive memory seemed; but this is perfunctory, a way of sewing things up. At its best, *Sunset Song*, for all its flaws, confirms that Davies is an artist; but somewhere along the way – somewhere in Luxembourg, perhaps – exhaustion set in. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Roy Boulter  
Solon Papadopoulos  
Nicolas Steil  
**Adapted by**  
Terence Davies  
[From the novel by]  
Lewis Grassie Gibbon  
**Director of Photography**  
Michael McDonough  
**Editor**  
David Charap  
**Production Designer**  
Andy Harris  
**Composer**  
Gast Waltzing  
**Sound Recordist**  
Marc Thill  
**Costume Designer**  
Uli Simon

©Sunset Song Ltd/  
Iris Productions/The  
British Film Institute  
**Production Companies**  
A Hurricane Films,  
Iris Productions

and SellOutPictures  
production  
Presented by  
BFI, Film Fund  
Luxembourg,  
Creative Scotland  
and BBC Scotland  
Supported by the  
National Lottery  
through Creative  
Scotland  
With the support  
of Film Fund  
Luxembourg  
In association  
with BBC, Iris,  
Hurricane Films,  
SellOutPictures  
Made with the  
support of the  
BFI’s Film Fund  
**Executive Producer**  
Bob Last

**Cast**  
Agyness Deyn  
Chris Guthrie  
Peter Mullan  
John Guthrie

**Kevin Guthrie**  
Ewan Tavendale  
**Peter Mullan**  
John Guthrie  
**Daniela Nardini**  
Jena Guthrie  
**Jack Greenlees**  
Will Guthrie  
**Ian Pirie**  
Chae Strachan

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Metrodome  
Distribution Ltd

Scotland, 1911. Farmer’s daughter Chris Guthrie is her school’s star pupil, destined for university. Her father is a stern, sometimes violent puritan, feared by his wife and hated by son Will. The family moves to Blawearie, a farm in the Mearns in the northeast of the country. Mrs Guthrie gives birth to twins after an agonising labour. Discovering that she is pregnant again, she poisons herself and the babies. Chris abandons the idea of university; two younger siblings are taken in by relatives. Will runs away to Canada. Guthrie has a stroke and is left helpless. One night he apparently tries to force his way into Chris’s bedroom; in the morning he is dead. Chris is now an independent woman. She falls in love with her brother’s friend Ewan Tavendale. They marry and have a child. War is declared and Ewan enlists. Home on leave, traumatised by his experiences in the army, he is violent and quarrelsome. He leaves for the front; shortly afterwards news arrives of his death. Their friend Chae, who was also at the front, tells Chris that Ewan was shot for desertion, having realised the futility of war. Chris is comforted to know that he died loving her.



True romance: Kevin Guthrie as Chris’s suitor Ewan Tavendale



## All About Them

France/Belgium 2015  
Director: Jérôme Bonnell

### Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

A strange seam of sexual violence runs through Jérôme Bonnell's *All About Them*. The film opens *in medias res* on Bastille Day, as 26-year-old defence advocate Mélodie (Anaïs Demoustier) arrives at the home of lover Charlotte (Sophie Verbeek) only to discover that the latter's live-in boyfriend Micha (Félix Moati) has returned unexpectedly early from a work trip. (A zoologist of some sort, Micha has been researching 'feminised fish', prompting peals of laughter from the women as they imagine fish with "long hair and swaying hips".) The couple invite Mélodie to dine with them; after dropping her home at the end of the evening, Micha kisses Mélodie, setting up an isosceles love triangle and cueing in a series of misadventures as Mélodie struggles to juggle her two paramours, each of whom is in the dark as to the other's indiscretions. Intercut with this comedy of errors are scenes of Mélodie at work, most frequently defending a serial sex offender. When Charlotte admonishes her that a small black slip of a dress is an "invitation to rape", the two strands coalesce briefly: a moment that is swiftly subsumed by slapstick but nonetheless leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

Indeed, there's something off-kilter about the film as a whole (not helped by poorly translated subtitles). Ostensibly a romantic comedy, it twists itself into existentialist drama, then bedroom farce and back again as it follows the gradual formation of this almost stereotypically Gallic *ménage à trois*. Shooting with a handheld camera, casting their subjects in soft red light and confining them for the most part to interiors, Bonnell and DP Pascal Lagriffoul rely heavily on close-ups and extreme close-ups (eschewing establishing shots almost – but not quite – entirely) to create an atmosphere that is intense yet peculiarly lacking in intimacy. The camera pushes up against the bodies on screen, sniffs their skin, conjuring the crisp crackle of a cotton mackintosh, the soft down of jersey nightwear, the hot breath and sticky skin of tangled limbs in bed. Extradiegetic music is kept to a minimum,



Feel three: Sophie Verbeek, Anaïs Demoustier

and what there is slight and melodic. During a party scene, the scent of tobacco, cheap wine and musky perfume seeps off the screen. An early sequence set within the interior of a car calls to mind Claire Denis's tactile masterpiece *Vendredi soir* (2002). But despite three elegant performances by the film's photogenic leads, the characters themselves remain beyond reach, with Charlotte in particular little more than a beautiful cipher.

And yet what appears at first glance to be the film's central failing transpires, as the story draws to its close, to be a considered strategy on Bonnell's part. That cloying closeness mirrors the desperate myopia of life in one's twenties; the bizarre tonal shifts, its manic highs and lows. Charlotte is not underdeveloped but deliberately enigmatic, a distinction on which the film's final denouement turns. *All About Them* is perhaps greater, then, than the sum of its parts. But if the film's queer dynamics and closing seaside setting recall the better work of François Ozon, viewers hoping for a transgressive – or, for that matter, progressive – vision of modern romance of the type that Ozon or Denis offer will be left disappointed. As Bonnell ties up loose ends, he unfortunately shuts down potential pluralities. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Edouard Weil  
**Written by**  
Jérôme Bonnell  
with the collaboration  
of Maël Pirou  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Pascal Lagriffoul  
**Editor**  
Julie Dupré  
**Art Direction**  
Eugénie Collet  
Florence Vercheval  
**Original Music**  
Mike Higbee  
**Sound**  
Frédéric de Ravignan  
**Costume Designer**  
Carole Gérard

©Rectangle  
Productions, Wild  
Bunch, France 3  
Cinéma, Scope  
Pictures  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Rectangle

Productions presents  
in co-production  
with Wild Bunch,  
France 3 Cinéma,  
Scope Pictures  
with the participation  
of Canal+, Ciné+,  
France Télévisions  
in association with  
La Banque Postale  
Image 7, Cinéma 11  
A film by Jérôme  
Bonnell  
A co-production  
of Rectangle  
Productions, Wild  
Bunch, France 3  
Cinéma, Scope  
Pictures  
Developed with the  
support of Cofinova 9

**Cast**  
**Anaïs Demoustier**  
Mélodie  
**Félix Moati**  
Micha

**Sophie Verbeek**  
Charlotte  
**Patrick d'Assunção**  
William

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Swipe Films

French theatrical title  
**À trois on y va**  
Onscreen English  
subtitle  
**All About Them!**

Lille, the present. Defence lawyer Mélodie has been having a five-month affair with Charlotte, who lives with her long-term boyfriend Micha. While dropping Mélodie off at home one evening, Micha confides that Charlotte is growing distant; he and Mélodie share a kiss. Mélodie feels that Charlotte is pulling away from her too. Micha pursues Mélodie while simultaneously trying to mend his ailing relationship with Charlotte. Neither Micha nor Charlotte knows of the other's sexual attraction to Mélodie.

Matters come to a head one evening when the three attend a party. A drunk man sees the women kissing and harangues them for being lesbians, and then punches Micha. Back at Micha and Charlotte's apartment, Mélodie – worn down by the pressures of work and the effort of maintaining her subterfuges – makes her feelings for both parties clear. The three sleep together.

The next day, Mélodie, Charlotte and Micha attend a wedding, having seemingly struck up a happy 'ménage à trois'. But after spending a second night with her two lovers, Charlotte leaves them sleeping and hitches a ride with strangers. In a voiceover, she tells them that they are more suited to love than she is, but that she will treasure the memory of their time together.

## Les Anarchistes

France 2015  
Director: Elie Wajeman  
Certificate 12A 101m 10s

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

The second feature from Elie Wajeman, whose 2012 *Aliyah* was critically acclaimed in France, *Les Anarchistes* opened with some fanfare at Cannes this year. And we can see why: the film explores the neglected topic of late-19th-century anarchism and has a high-profile cast that includes two of France's hottest young stars, Tahar Rahim (from *A Prophet*) and Adèle Exarchopoulos (*Blue Is the Warmest Colour*). But despite such promise, the result is underwhelming.

At first sight *Les Anarchistes* is a classic story of infiltration. Jean (Rahim) is an ambitious young policeman from an impoverished but educated background (he can quote Victor Hugo). Offered the chance to rise through the ranks by infiltrating a group of anarchists, he goes undercover in a factory and, predictably, befriends the men he meets there, especially 'Biscuit' (Karim Leklou) and Elisée (Swann Arlaud), and falls in love with the latter's girlfriend Judith (Exarchopoulos). As he takes part in the group's actions while reporting back to his superior, his position becomes increasingly ambiguous.

This potentially dramatic material is weakened chiefly by authorial choices. One is the drab blue-grey palette that has become a cliché of historical film and television. This, coupled with an excessive recourse to close-ups, robs the film of the usual pleasures of historical drama – spectacular tableaux, sensual costumes, ensemble acting. Even taking into account the modest budget, *Les Anarchistes* is visually flat. Generic confusion is another issue: information is scarce and one is left to ponder the politics and social complexities of the characters (apparently based on real-life models), factory workers who somehow live in an elegant Parisian apartment. Nor does the film exploit the suspense inherent in Jean's double-agent situation. Wajeman appears more interested in the thwarted romance between Jean and Judith, yet even this remains tepid. A suggested queer attraction between Elisée and Jean could have lifted the film into less conventional territory but it remains just that, a suggestion. The attempt to modernise the story by using anachronistic music (a piece by The Kinks and reggae at the beginning and end) feels derivative – one thinks of Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006) – rather than insightful.



The wrong man: Adèle Exarchopoulos



Hemmed in by such narrative and stylistic restrictions, the normally excellent actors fail to sparkle. There is surprisingly little onscreen chemistry between the two stars (and was it necessary to make Exarchopoulos's nose run while she cries, as at the end of *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*?). There are a few flashes of brilliance, such as when characters speak directly to camera, and from some of the surrounding cast, especially Arlaud and the filmmaker Cédric Kahn as Gaspard, Jean's police chief. But this isn't enough to save a film that navigates awkwardly between genre and auteur cinema, with neither the pleasures of the former nor the singularity of the latter. In the end, this fictional recreation pales by comparison with the striking portraits of the real-life anarchists we see during the opening credits. Their piercing gazes hint at untold, fascinating stories, but they are not the ones on offer in *Les Anarchistes*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Lola Gans	France Télévisions, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée, Canal+, Ciné+	Chevandier <b>Cédric Kahn</b> Gaspard
<b>Screenplay</b> Elie Wajeman Gaëlle Macé		<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]
<b>Cinematography</b> David Chizallet	With the support of Région Île-de-France in partnership with CNC, Soficinéma	<b>Subtitles</b>
<b>Editor</b> François Quiquéré	9 Développement and Procrep	<b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited
<b>Art Director</b> Denis Hager	In association with La Banque Postale	
<b>Original Music</b> Gloria Jacobsen	Image 8, Manon 5, A Plus Image 5 and Soficinéma 11	
<b>Sound</b> Laurent Benaim Sandy Notarianni Matthieu Deniau Emmanuel Croset		
<b>Costumes</b> Anais Romand	<b>Cast</b> <b>Tahar Rahim</b> Jean Albertini <b>Adèle</b> <b>Exarchopoulos</b> Judith Lorillard <b>Swann Arlaud</b> Elisée Mayer <b>Guillaume Gouix</b> Eugène Levêque <b>Karim Leklou</b> Marcel Deloche, 'Biscuit' <b>Sarah Le Picard</b> Marie-Louise	
©24 Mai Production, France 2 Cinéma, Mars Films <b>Production</b> <b>Companies</b> 24 Mai Production presents in co-production with Mars Films, France 2 Cinéma With the participation of		

Paris, 1899. Jean Albertini, a young policeman from a poor background, is sent by his boss Gaspard to infiltrate a group of anarchists. He breaks with his old life, including his girlfriend, and is given a job in a nail factory in order to approach a group known to work there. He befriends their leader Elisée and his girlfriend Judith, as well as Biscuit, Eugène and Marie-Louise. Gradually Jean is taken into their confidence; all the while he sends reports on their activities to his superiors. Jean falls in love with Judith and starts a clandestine liaison with her; it is not clear whether Elisée knows or suspects, but he seems not to care and to be very fond of Jean. Jean takes part in the group's actions, which escalate from robbing rich households when the owners are away to armed bank robbery. Biscuit is fatally wounded during a raid. When the group plan to blow up a high-ranking judge, Jean reluctantly goes with them. At their apartment, the group are confronted by police, presumably tipped off by Jean. Elisée shoots himself and the others are arrested. From the street, Judith witnesses the arrest and learns of Jean's true identity. The film ends with her voiceover reading a letter from America, where she has fled, accusing Jean of betrayal.

## At Any Price

USA/United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Ramin Bahrani  
Certificate 18 104m 22s

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The corn is as high as an elephant's eye in *At Any Price* – the second most recent feature by prodigious wannabe neorealist Ramin Bahrani. That the film is hitting UK theatres more than three years after its initial festival bow – and after his subsequent and superior *99 Homes* – might hint that it's not the writer-director's very best work. But the truth is even more painful. This is one of the most egregious American dramas in recent memory.

Bahrani has typically kept his cinema small-scale and has succeeded on those modest terms. *At Any Price* is a larger, slicker production with a starry ensemble cast, and the upgraded production mode doesn't flatter the director's slender talent. The avatar of Bahrani's overweening failure here is Dennis Quaid, who gives Iowan seed-farming impresario Henry Whipple a bizarrely incongruous Jack Nicholson grin and snarls through his line readings as if auditioning for *The Last Detail* (1973) or *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975).

If the intention of the actor – and the filmmaker – is to evoke the heyday and heroes of the New Hollywood, it's a dismal, overdetermined failure (and out of place in a film so tethered to the present tense). Instead of focusing on Henry's glad-handing dishonesty, we're overly conscious of this usually fine actor's embarrassing exertions. As the film opens, Henry has his back to the wall: his business is failing despite his aggressive MO, and his hot-headed son Dean (Zac Efron) isn't much concerned with picking up the slack. Instead, he dreams of being a Nascar star and rehearses his ambitions on the dusty local circuit, one ominous lap at a time.

Both father and son have one-track minds, and for a while it seems like *At Any Price* is giving us two formulaic movies in one: an agricultural potboiler outlining Henry's unethical practice (he harvests and sells genetically modified crops) and a kamikaze sports flick about Dean's rise to fame and fortune. But as the plot strands start coming together, it's clear that this is a movie with a grand



Cornfield: Dennis Quaid

and unified vision, one pretentious enough to include a scene where a bandstand's worth of earnest small-towners sing along to 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. It's a craven retread of a similar scene near the end of *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and here it's also meant as a kind of state-of-the-Union-address – *At Any Price* means to diagnose what ails America in the early 21st century.

The disease – surprise! – is our old friend the profit motive, which clouds judgement, hardens hearts and turns ordinary Midwesterners into avaricious, murdering monsters. (To paraphrase Kanye West: there's blood on the sheaves.) The late sequences are thick with Biblical allusions – think Cain and Abel – but it's finally a passage from Galatians that best pegs both the underlying theme and the artistic failure of this ridiculous movie, and that can be applied equally to Henry Whipple and Ramin Bahrani: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Christine Vachon Ramin Bahrani Kevin Turen Justin Nappi Pamela Koffler	<b>Production Designer</b> Chad Keith <b>Music Composer/</b> <b>Score Produced by</b> Dickon Hinchliffe <b>Sound Mixer</b> Justin Gray <b>Costume Designers</b> Tere Duncan Sandy Lazar	Exclusive Media present a Killer Films/Noruz Films production A film by Ramin Bahrani In association with Cineric, Inc., JSC Entertainment, Big Indie Pictures Made possible in part with support from the Sundance Institute Cinereach Feature Film Fellowship Recipient of a United	States Artists Ford Fellowship <b>Executive Producers</b> Ron Curtis Mohammed Al Turki Eric Nyari Brian Young <b>Film Extracts</b> <i>Final Destination</i> 5 (2011)	Dean Whipple <b>Kim Dickens</b> Irene Whipple <b>Heather Graham</b> Meredith Crown <b>Clancy Brown</b> Jim Johnson <b>Chelcie Ross</b> Byron <b>Red West</b> Cliff Whipple <b>Maika Monroe</b> Cadence Farrow <b>Stephen Grush</b> Torgeson <b>Dan Waller</b>	Larry Brown <b>Patrick Stevens</b> Grant Whipple  <b>Dolby Digital</b> <b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited
<b>Written by</b> Hallie Elizabeth Newton Ramin Bahrani <b>Director of</b> <b>Photography</b> Michael Simmonds <b>Editor</b> Afonso Gonçalves	<b>©Farm Film LLC</b> <b>Production</b> <b>Companies</b> Black Bear Pictures, TreeHouse Pictures,		<b>Cast</b> <b>Dennis Quaid</b> Henry Whipple <b>Zac Efron</b>		

Iowa, the present. Seed farmer Henry Whipple wants to give the family business to his older son Grant, who is away in South America. Henry's younger son Dean dreams of being a racing driver, and doesn't want to follow in his father's footsteps. Henry is in constant competition with another farmer, Jim Johnson, who is supplied by the same seed company, Liberty. Jim's clientele is larger; Henry covets his land and his money. He slakes his frustrations by sleeping with a younger woman, Meredith. Dean is

also having a difficult time, as he loses an important race; he and Meredith have sex in a corn silo. The Whipple farm is visited by agents from the seed company, who suspect that Henry has sold washed seeds – an ethical violation. Dean suspects that it was Jim's son Brad who tipped off Liberty. Dean and Brad get into a fight in one of the fields, and Dean accidentally kills Brad. Henry learns about the crime and covers it up; he tells his wife that he committed the murder. Dean decides to work on the farm.



## Bound to Vengeance

USA/Mexico 2014  
Director: J.M. Cravioto  
Certificate 18 79m 23s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Mexican director José Manuel Cravioto's female vigilante movie skips the explicit abuse featured in the *I Spit on Your Grave* films to get straight into the table-turning (the original title was *Reversal*) and bloody revenge rampage.

Though the villain (Richard Tyson) is chained and badly injured, he manages to manipulate the startlingly inept heroine – first by claiming to be a lowly minion in the organisation he actually commands, then by taking her to victims so damaged as to be impossible to save. Bathetically, one runs out of her prison to impale herself fatally on a fence, while the next is so terrorised that she fights her rescuer and has to be put down.

As heroine Eve, Tina Ivlev has a strong, bloody-minded presence but the script keeps forcing her to do foolish things to keep its all-through-the-night atrocity tour rolling on to the next semi-derelict sex dungeon. Intermittent home-movie flashbacks to happier days are so insistent that the big twist about Eve's boyfriend is given away long before we get to it. The exact source of Eve's guilt about the girl who was taken at the same time as her and died in captivity comes more or less out of nowhere and adds to the confusion of a busy but unengaging last reel. **S**



Fightback club: Tina Ivlev

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Daniel Posada  
Rodolfo Marquez  
Alex Garcia  
**Written by**  
Rock Shaink  
Keith Kjørnes  
**Director of Photography**  
Byron Werner  
**Edited by**  
Jorge Macaya  
**Production Designer**  
Adriana Serrano  
**Music**  
Simon Boswell  
**Sound Mixer**  
Dutch Vannette  
**Costume Designer**  
Cari Avila

©Switch  
Productions, LLC

**Production Companies**  
Dark Factory  
Entertainment  
presents a  
Dark Factory  
Entertainment  
production in  
association with  
Itaca Films  
**Executive Producers**  
Rock Shaink  
Katrina Wolfe  
Alexis Fridman  
Jai Khanna  
Jonas Ortega  
Luke Daniels

**Cast**  
Tina Ivlev  
Eve  
Richard Tyson

Phil  
Bianca Malinowski  
Lea  
Stephanie Charles  
Nina  
Dustin Quick  
Laura  
Dylan Thomas  
Eve's sister  
Ric Sarabia  
skinny man  
Scott Vance  
tall man  
Keith Johnson  
fat man  
Kris Kjørnes  
Ronnie

**In Colour**

**Distributor**  
Content Media

US, present day. Having been abducted and abused for some months, Eve manages to overpower Phil, her keeper, and free herself. Phil convinces her that other kidnapped women will die if she kills him. She forces him to guide her to the houses where the other women are kept. She discovers that Phil is the leader of a gang which abducts girls into sex slavery. She kills several of the criminals and frees some of their victims. In the final house, she discovers that her boyfriend Ronnie is a scout for the abductors. She kills him and delivers Phil to his middle-class home.

## Burnt

USA 2015  
Director: John Wells  
Certificate 15 100m 54s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

After years of striking terror into the hearts of ill-equipped restaurant staff on both sides of the Atlantic, Gordon Ramsay's *Kitchen Nightmares* has finally been adapted for the big screen! Or, at least, *Burnt* is something that smells very much like it: Adam Jones (Bradley Cooper) is a French-trained, two-star Michelin chef looking to get his third by taking over the London restaurant owned by the father of his friend Tony (Daniel Brühl). Like Ramsay, Adam's approach to preparing food is hyper-macho perfectionism, so he manages his staff by hurling plates and verbal abuse at them when something's been cooked at slightly the wrong temperature. Perhaps because this script was originally completed/publicised by the Black List competition back in 2007 (before Ramsay was attached as an executive producer), Adam's bad-boy backstory has more than a dash of Anthony Bourdain's biography – hard drugs, alcohol, womanising and a love of oysters cultivated as a teen.

Yet despite the specificity of the setting and dick-swinging culinary icons referenced, *Burnt* remains firmly within the realm of the generic. There's nothing said about addiction here that couldn't have been gleaned from another film about substance abuse. When Adam makes fun of Dr Rosshilde (a completely wasted Emma Thompson) for issuing pop-psychology platitudes while testing his blood for booze and drugs as part of his agreement with the restaurant, you side with him, as nothing she says is remotely insightful (and, at one point, violates doctor-patient confidentiality). Similarly, there's never any discussion of what type of cuisine Adam specialises in, let alone what's actually on the menu that he and his underlings slave to realise exactly day and after day. The most frequently discussed point about cooking technique is whether or not to incorporate a sous vide (a machine that cooks meat sealed in a plastic bag in water) into his kitchen, something that Adam objects to, as if it were cheating – even though it's been widely used by top (ie French) chefs since the 70s.

This fierce anti-bag rhetoric – which is about



Captain cook: Bradley Cooper

as fascinating as you might imagine – is supposed to be proof of Adam's integrity and genius, the two qualities that give him the right to behave vituperatively and still win the day. After a rough night when his chances of getting his third star have seemingly been scuppered by a vengeful member of staff, an old rival (Matthew Rhys) assures him, "You're better than me... we need you to lead us to places we wouldn't otherwise go." But since what it is that sets Adam apart food-wise remains obscured – often quite literally, with director John Wells rendering some excellent locations (such as Billingsgate fish market) out of focus in favour of getting the sharpest close-ups of Cooper's square jaw – his power seems to lie entirely in his aggressive ego and good looks.

This translates to his achievements outside the kitchen: he's bedded the *Evening Standard's* lesbian food critic (a two-scene cameo by Uma Thurman) and his mentor's daughter (another two-scene cameo, this time by Alicia Vikander) and is the recipient of Tony's unwavering love. (Tony's subplot – aside from being yet another Hollywood film where gay desire is equated with suffering and has no physical component – is resolved in a cruelly joking fashion and adds nothing to the film.) Adam finally redeems himself by winning the love of his hot young sous chef – whom he throttles over an undercooked turbot. Abusive bastards should never be allowed to go down this easy. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Stacey Sher  
Erwin Stoff  
John Wells  
**Screenplay**  
Steven Knight  
**Story**  
Michael Kalesniko  
**Director of Photography**  
Adriano Goldman  
**Edited by**  
Nick Moore

**Production Designer**  
David Gropman  
**Music by/Score**  
Produced by  
Rob Simonsen  
**Supervising Sound Editors**  
Glynn Grimala  
Lon Bender  
**Costume Designer**  
Lynn Elizabeth Paolo  
©The Weinstein

**Company Production Companies**  
The Weinstein Company presents a Shiny Penny/3 Arts Entertainment/Battle Mountain Films production  
**Executive Producers**  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein  
Michael Sharnberg

**Cast**  
Bradley Cooper  
Adam Jones  
Sienna Miller  
Helene  
Omar Sy  
Michel

**Daniel Brühl**  
Tony  
Riccardo Scamarcio  
Max  
Sam Keeley  
David  
Alicia Vikander  
Anne Marie  
Matthew Rhys  
Reece  
Lily James  
Sara  
Uma Thurman

Simone  
Emma Thompson  
Doctor Rosshilde

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

New Orleans, the present. Having spent time working in Paris after losing his restaurant due to his drug use and outrageous behaviour, American chef Adam Jones flies to London to rebuild his career. He arranges for the 'Evening Standard' food critic to eat at the hotel owned by the father of his friend Tony; with Adam as chef, the restaurant gets a positive review and he is given the job full-time. Service on opening night doesn't meet Adam's standards, so he refunds all the customers and offers free food for a week. Service improves. Parisian

gang members beat him up for drug money, but Adam still cooks afterwards in the hope of pleasing two Michelin inspectors. One of his former staff from Paris, whose restaurant Adam ruined through a malicious prank, intentionally puts too much cayenne in the dish and it's sent back. Distraught, Adam goes on a drinking binge. Given a pep talk by a rival chef, he recommit to sobriety and starts attending group therapy. It transpires that the two men weren't in fact from Michelin; some new possible inspectors arrive.



# By the Sea

USA/Japan 2015

Director: Angelina Jolie Pitt

## Reviewed by Adam Nayman

There is one utterly indelible image in *By the Sea*, and its director is smart enough to repeat it over and over again. At least six times – and maybe more – Angelina Jolie Pitt cuts to a shot of herself and Brad Pitt crouching by a peephole carved in a hotel wall, surreptitiously spying on a pair of randy newlyweds. The visual of Hollywood's reigning power couple – Mr and Mrs Smith in the flesh! – peeking at somebody else's marriage is surprising, audacious, suggestive and hilarious.

It's also a terrifically self-reflexive emblem for a film that's been written off as a his-and-hers vanity project pretty much since it was announced. Now, there is certainly a strain of narcissism running through *By the Sea*, which strands its stars in Malta in the 1970s, all the better to lounge dissolutely in rumpled linen suits and blowsy nightgowns from the Liz Taylor Collection. As studies of spousal disintegration go, this is way more chic than *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) or *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) to name but two of the canonical lock-horn melodramas that surely inspired Jolie Pitt's original screenplay.

Rough-hewn naturalism is not on the menu here. From the moment Roland (Pitt) and Vanessa (Jolie Pitt) step out of their vintage Citroën to swig a mid-afternoon drink at the ocean's edge, we're thrown into a kind of perfume-commercial fantasyland (the fragrant cinematography is by Christian Berger) where the sun glints just so off of every mirrored surface, and everybody slouches and lolls in a self-medicated stupor. "I want to get drunk for breakfast," slurs stubbly, writer's-blocked Roland to the gracious local bartender (Niels Arestrup) who becomes his daily sounding board/marriage counsellor while Vanessa stays cooped up in their rented room with the curtains drawn, harbouring a secret so dark it will take the better part of a 132-minute movie to illuminate.

These early passages are as intractable as wax museum tableaux; *By the Sea* doesn't really spring to life until Vanessa takes an interest in the guests next door, Lea (Mélanie Laurent) and François (Melvil Poupaud), whose lovemaking sessions offer a vicarious distraction from her own sexless evenings. She's so stoned on pills that she typically passes out before Roland gets back from the bar, at which point he's too far gone to do much more than play out next to her anyway (and when they're both awake they try to make each other feel like shit). The combination of condescension, competitiveness and envy that underlies the pair's shared surveillance of their younger counterparts is superbly modulated by both actors, who are skilled and smart enough to play this part of the script as naughty comedy. It also helps that Jolie Pitt and her cast are fully committed to the full-bodied (and full-frontal) eroticism of the material.

It's hard to remember the last wide-release American film that featured sex so omnipresently – not as dramatic incident but as texture. Possibly *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), which had similar extra-textual heft but was also basically a puppet show, with Kubrick pulling his A-listers' strings. Here, it's Jolie Pitt putting herself on display, at times boringly and at times confrontationally, as in a bathtub coupling that all but dares viewers to think back to her double mastectomy and



Couples retreat: Angelina Jolie Pitt

speculate about the status of the body they're gawking at. There's a different sort of exposure at work here as well. Without revealing the true source of Vanessa's sadness, it's fair to say it's been strategically engineered to contradict the public persona of the woman playing her – a reversal of expectations that's explicitly hinted at when Roland asks Vanessa if what she really wants is to be with somebody who doesn't know her.

Whether this is mere coy gamesmanship or a filmmaker working through a constellation

of personal anxieties is hard to say for sure. But it's at least as interesting to ask the question here as in, say, a movie by Woody Allen, whose recent work displays some of the same alternate-dimensional affectlessness that Jolie Pitt is going to get killed for when it's arguably a deliberate strategy (*Husbands and Wives* could have been the title of this one). Chances are that *By the Sea* will end up filed in the 'guilty pleasures' section when all is said and done, and yet it doesn't have much to apologize for. **B**

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Brad Pitt  
Angelina Jolie Pitt  
**Written by**  
Angelina Jolie Pitt  
**Director of Photography**  
Christian Berger  
**Editors**  
Patricia Rommel  
Martin Pensa

**Production Designer**  
Jon Hutman  
**Music**  
Gabriel Yared  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
David Stephenson  
**Costume Designer**  
Ellen Mirojnick  
©Universal Studios

**Production Companies**  
Universal Pictures presents a Jolie Pas production  
Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc.  
**Executive Producers**

Michael Vieira  
Holly Goline-Sadowski  
Chris Brigham  
**Cast**  
Brad Pitt  
Roland  
Angelina Jolie Pitt  
Vanessa  
Mélanie Laurent

Lea  
Melvil Poupaud  
François  
Niels Arestrup  
Michel  
Richard Bohringer  
Patrice  
**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Eire

Malta, the 1970s. American author Roland and his wife Vanessa, a former dancer, are holidaying in Malta. They seem to have an unspoken agreement that Roland will spend his days at the hotel bar writing – but really just drinking – while Vanessa remains in the room. Sometimes she takes walks on the beach. Their communication is limited and one evening, when Roland comes home drunk and tries to touch her, she violently fights him off. Vanessa takes notice of a honeymooning couple in the room next door, François and Lea, and invites the latter to play cards with her in her room; Roland asks if she's trying to manipulate him into desiring the younger woman. He later discovers that Vanessa has been spying on François and Lea through a hole in the wall between the two rooms, and is surprised when she lets him join in on her peeping. Over the course of

several days, Roland and Vanessa alternate between spending time with François and Lea (including a sailing expedition) and spying on them, which in turn seems to reanimate their own sex life to some degree. Roland takes Vanessa out to dinner and dancing but she suffers a fainting spell and he brings her home. The next day, he becomes enraged when he sees her in François's room initiating a sexual encounter, and attacks the other man. He confronts Vanessa and tells her that she's trying to break up François and Lea's marriage because Lea is pregnant and she is barren. He explains to a heartbroken Lea that Vanessa suffered a pair of miscarriages, which seems to mollify her enough to forgive her husband. The experience seems to alleviate Roland's writer's block, and he puts down his experiences in a volume called 'By the Sea'. He and Vanessa drive out of town, presumably back home.



## Chemsex

USA 2015

Directors: William Fairman, Max Gogarty  
Certificate 18 83m 5s

### Reviewed by Alex Davidson

In their unnerving and grimly effective documentary, triggered by an article for *Vice* magazine, William Fairman and Max Gogarty explore the phenomenon of chemsex: the use of drugs such as crystal meth, GHB and mephedrone during sexual activity (often group sex, lasting several days). Interviewing those who practise chemsex, and David Stuart, the substance-use leader 56 Dean Street, currently the UK's only chemsex support clinic, the filmmakers explore the origins and consequences of this dangerous activity. Many of the talking heads are 56 Dean Street clients.

The stories are harrowing. One man talks about waking up on a strange bathroom floor after a violent sexual assault he can't even remember; another explains the extreme drug-induced paranoia he lives with. The film notes the distinction between the perceived 'good gays', who want to marry, have kids and assimilate with heteronormative society, and the 'bad gays', who take drugs, have lots of sex and are happy to live outside the mainstream. Poignantly, their need for chemsex derives in part from a yearning to belong to a community. The film shows how chemsex has created its own twisted Polari, with participants casually dropping scene slang, from drug shorthand ('M-cat', 'Tina', 'G') to euphemisms for extreme activities, such as 'slamming' (taking crystal or mephedrone intravenously) and, most alarmingly, getting 'pozzed up' (deliberately infected with HIV). It's a surreal underworld where some gay men express a sense of relief at being diagnosed with a virus that they see as the inevitable consequence of chemsex.

The mood of self-destruction is relentless. Even the rare moments of humour quickly darken.

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Max Gogarty  
William Fairman  
Al Brown

#### Cinematography

Benjie Croce  
William Fairman  
Max Gogarty

#### Editors

Graham Taylor  
Marta Velasquez

#### Art Direction

Adam Bracegirdle

Valerio Oliveri

Natasha Havelock

#### Composer

Daniel Harle

#### Sound Design

Peregrine Andrews

@Vice Media, LLC

#### Production Company

A film by William  
Fairman & Max  
Gogarty

A Vice production

#### Executive Producers

Al Brown  
Kevin Sutcliffe  
Jacqueline Edenbrow

#### In Colour

[1.78:1] and [1.25:1]

#### Distributor

Peccadillo  
Pictures Ltd

**A documentary exploring the chemsex scene among London's gay community. Several men talk about taking drugs such as crystal meth, GHB and mephedrone in their sexual encounters. Some, such as Enrique, have managed to break the cycle and no longer practise chemsex. Others, while aware of the dangers, prefer the chemsex lifestyle to one of sobriety. Many tell of their experiences of violence during chemsex and the grim side effects of the drugs. David Stuart, founder of chemsex support clinic 56 Dean Street, talks about his past drug-taking. One of his clients, Simon, visits the clinic regularly, but struggles to resist chemsex meet-ups. At a panel discussion, a sauna owner is accused of enabling men to have drug-fuelled sex through lax security checks. Many of the interviewees are HIV-positive, and express a sense of relief at being diagnosed with a virus that they see as an inevitable consequence of their activity. End credits reveal that many of the interviewees no longer practice chem-sex.**



Nighthawks: *Chemsex*

An amusingly incongruous cut from a gay man chatting about fisting and then politely offering the cameraman a cup of tea is subverted when the man recalls being forcibly injected for the first time against his will during group sex. One of the most interesting talking heads is Mark Ford, owner of Soho gay sauna Sweatbox, who is accused in a debate at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern of being complicit in chemsex culture by offering a service that encourages dangerous sex. He does a convincing job of demonstrating Sweatbox's no-drug policy, questioning instead the lack of personal responsibility on the part of the men who take the drugs.

The filmmakers question why this is a predominantly gay male activity (women hardly appear in the film). Stuart effectively makes a case that the internalised shame hanging over from the Aids crisis and the bullying that many experienced in their youth have led to a cycle of self-abuse. The easy accessibility of chemsex through apps such as Grindr enables that cycle to continue. One of the film's greatest achievements is to show the allure of chemsex encounters without ever glamorising them (unlike the photographer we see exhibiting portraits sensationalising the act).

It's a very dark film, aesthetically and in its content. The opening borrows some of the aesthetics of horror movies, with shots of a night-time cityscape and clouds drifting past a full moon. Daniel Harle's moody, menacing score sounds fantastic, though it's used excessively. A scene in which a man descends into twitching paranoia before and after 'slamming' is disquieting enough, without snarling synths prompting the audience to feel horrified. Nonetheless, this is an impressive and mature work from two first-time filmmakers, who transform a study that would normally be suited to a TV documentary into something genuinely cinematic. It is to be hoped that the 18 certificate and harrowing subject matter won't prevent its important messages reaching audiences. **Ⓔ**

## Chic!

France 2014

Director: Jérôme Cornuau  
Certificate 12A 103m 19s

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

In theory, *Chic!* contains all the required ingredients for a successful romcom: excellent actors (Fanny Ardant, Marina Hands and Eric Elmosnino), a glamorous milieu (the Parisian fashion world) and a plot in which a sparring couple eventually overcome their differences to produce a happy end. Alas, following a proven formula does not guarantee success. While the hugely expanding field of the French romcom has produced some gems, from *Amélie* (2001) to *Jet Lag* (2002), *I Do* (2006) and *Priceless* (2006), Jérôme Cornuau's *Chic!* is not one of them.

A major hurdle is that none of the three main characters is remotely sympathetic, even accounting for the genre's need to exaggerate. Alicia (Ardant) is a snobbish, hysterical and tyrannical fashion diva who goes haywire after her boyfriend leaves her. Her uptight assistant Hélène (Hands) is charged by her ridiculous and equally tyrannical boss (Laurent Stocker) to find a replacement 'muse' so that Alicia will be inspired to design her forthcoming collection. Their choice of Hélène's gruff landscape designer Julien (Elmosnino) introduces a familiar romcom theme: the clash of two opposing worlds.

Against the impeccably groomed Hélène and the extravagant Alicia, Julien evidently represents 'the natural': hirsute and unshaven, plodding over parquet floors in dirty boots and shapeless sweaters. Ardant and Elmosnino's talents can't manage to pull their characters away from stereotype and instead of the meeting of two cultures, the film offers a crude satire of both – as, for instance, in the two contrasting party scenes: a snobbish fashion soirée in Paris and a 'down-home' birthday party in Brittany are equally embarrassing, without wit or charm.

More damagingly for a romcom de facto aimed at women, the two major female characters keep fighting each other and are then in turn subjected to humiliation. Alicia has to be told that the gardener she has fallen for is a hired gigolo, and Hélène's professional identity is reduced to a sterile desire for control. Naturally it falls to Julien to teach both women about 'real life'. Not for the first time in film, admittedly,



Design of the times: Fanny Ardant



# Christmas with the Coopers

USA 2015

Director: Jessie Nelson

## Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

Christmas films seldom mention the birth in Bethlehem, but it reverberates in genre templates. Scrooge stories illustrate darkened humanity revived; tales affirming the incredible existence of Santa dimly echo the wonder of the crib; and dramas of family gatherings underline the desirability of peace on Earth and much needed mercy mild. Satisfying accounts of festive loggerheads include *The Holly and the Ivy* (1953), with vicar Ralph Richardson proving himself far sharper than his worldly children suppose, and *This Christmas* (2007), tracking Idris Elba's lively clan in sunny LA. But slip up and these films can become soap opera with snowflakes, quickly melting from memory. Such is *Christmas with the Coopers*, a star-studded family tapestry about, and for, people who could do without Christmas. Aiming for bittersweet character-driven charm, it never fully delivers, proving a handsomely shot slog loaded with characters absorbed in self-analysis. *Christmas with the Coopers* may spurn the traditional ox and ass but it's not short of yak.

Set on Christmas Eve, the film draws together the family of Sam (John Goodman, nicely restrained) and Charlotte (Diane Keaton, autopilot), secretly about to divorce. Scenes of family members' assorted personal problems glide smoothly by for so long, like Arthur Hailey on eggnog, that you feel the film is aquaplaning on plotlines: Alan Arkin tutors waitress Amanda Seyfried in classic films; Marisa Tomei, arrested for shoplifting, lectures a gay policeman on self-acceptance; single dad Ed Helms, fresh from the Ben Stiller school of put-upon American males, can't find work even at Staples. At the airport, hardbitten Democrat Eleanor (Olivia Wilde, buzzing) flirts with Republican soldier Joe, soon to deploy, and persuades him to visit her parents posing as her beau. (As they concoct a 'how we met' story, their fabrications touchingly betray their genuine attraction.) But when all these strands come together, nothing very explosive happens.

Director Jessie Nelson handled emotional stories well with *Corrina, Corrina* (1994) and *I Am Sam* (2001), and as a producer and writer probed yuletide sibling strain in *Fred Claus* (2007).



Cooped up: John Goodman

But Steven Rogers's screenplay brandishes real-world problems only to sell us short with facile solutions – a job pops up; a divorcing couple realise they're still madly in love; a woman longing for children decides that, hey, she's got other family. Everyone gets up and dances. It rather brings to mind Barry Levinson's story of the filmgoer who wanted Rain Man to snap out of it.

Rogers digs deep with lines such as, "I've known you for most of my life and clearly you have no idea who I am." (Tune in next week.) Many of the jokes weren't funny even when they were new: a swearing child, a confused old woman, a sweaty teenager and a big-nosed man who gets called Schnozzle. Marisa Tomei raises the most laughs, griping about charity donation Christmas gifts, or insisting her shoplifting a brooch in her mouth was a misunderstanding ("I thought it was a lozenge").

The film is strong on poignant stabs of memory. Dead loved ones are glimpsed briefly across rooms. When arguing with youthful vigour, people in mid-discussion fleetingly become their juvenile selves. Meanwhile, Wes Anderson-style cutaway shots quirkily confirm statements made by our narrator, Rags the dog (faux-weary voiceover by Steve Martin).

The film's US title, *Love the Coopers*, sidesteps Christmas completely, emphasising its secular shrug to the whole holidays thing. If the profanity and off-colour humour about carols and prayers put off audiences who love Christmas, the cloying denouement should put off everyone else. Ⓢ

## Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producer</b> Alain Terzian	Films, Studiocanal, France 2 Cinéma	<b>Subtitles</b>
<b>Screenplay/Dialogue</b> Jean-Paul Bathany	co-production with the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions	<b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited
<b>Director of Photography</b> Stephane Cami	A film by Jérôme Cornuau	
<b>Editor</b> Brian Schmitt	<b>Executive Producer</b> Michel Schmidt	
<b>Art Director</b> Denis Mercier		
<b>Music</b> René Aubry	<b>Cast</b> Fanny Ardant	
<b>Sound</b> Lucien Balibar	Alicia Ricosi	
Aymeric Devoldere	Marina Hands	
Herve Buirette	Hélène Birk	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Pierre-Jean Larroque	Eric Elmosnino	
	Julien Lefort	
	Laurent Stocker	
	Alan Bergam	
	Philippe Duquesne	
	Jean-Guy	
	Catherine Hosmalin	
	Caroline Langer	
	<b>Dolby Digital</b>	
	<b>In Colour</b>	
	[2.35:1]	

Paris and Brittany, the present. Alicia Ricosi is a highly strung couture designer who threatens to cancel her next collection when her boyfriend leaves her. In desperation, her assistant Hélène Birk and boss Alan Bergam decide to recruit a male 'muse' to entice her to carry on working. After unsuccessfully trying a male model, they opt for Julien Lefort, Hélène's boorish landscape designer, with whom Alicia has, through a chance meeting, fallen in love. Hélène tracks him down to his home in Brittany; he initially turns down her offer but she tricks him into accepting by sinking his daughter's boat and offering him a lot of money to replace it. Julien's role as a muse is eventually successful and Alicia recovers her creativity. She and her team move into Hélène's home, where Julien is also staying. Having fallen in love with Julien, Hélène becomes increasingly jealous of Alicia. Hélène's virulent criticism of fashion critic Caroline Langer leads the latter to write a terrible review of Alicia's work; Hélène is sacked. After a row with Alicia, she leaves for Brittany. Julien initially rejects her, as he has discovered that she sank the boat, but he changes his mind and they kiss passionately. Alicia's collection triumphs in Paris.

## Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Michael London Janice Williams Jessie Nelson	<b>Music</b> Nick Urata	Groundswell Films, Handwritten Films
<b>Sound Mixer</b> Jim Ermswiler	<b>Sound Mixer</b> Jim Ermswiler	production
<b>Written by</b> Steven Rogers	<b>Costume Designer</b> Hope Hanafin	<b>Executive Producers</b> Kim Roth Anna Culp Ted Gidlow
<b>Director of Photography</b> Elliot Davis		Steven Rogers Diane Keaton
<b>Editor</b> Nancy Richardson		<b>Film Extracts</b> <i>City Lights</i> (1931) <i>Born Yesterday</i> (1951)
<b>Production Designer</b> Beth Rubino		
	<b>Companies</b> CBS Films presents an Imagine Entertainment,	

US, the present. As Sam and Charlotte Cooper prepare to host Christmas, family secrets abound. Sam and Charlotte plan to separate. Their son Hank is jobless. Daughter Eleanor resents parental concern for her wellbeing. Charlotte's father Bucky has feelings for unhappy young waitress Ruby.

Lonely sister Emma is caught shoplifting a brooch. Eleanor meets soldier Joe and persuades him to pose as her boyfriend over Christmas.

<b>Cast</b> Alan Arkin Bucky Newport John Goodman Sam Cooper Ed Helms Hank Cooper Diane Keaton Charlotte Cooper Anthony Mackie Officer Williams Amanda Seyfried Ruby	<b>June Squibb</b> Aunt Fishy Marisa Tomei Emma Newport Olivia Wilde Eleanor Jake Lacy Joe Bailey Alex Borstein Angie Jon Tenney Doctor Morrissey Timothée Chalamet	Charlie Steve Martin voice of Rags the dog  <b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> E! Films  US theatrical title <i>Love the Coopers</i>
--	---	--

Emma talks the gay policeman arresting her into accepting his sexuality. Bucky urges Ruby not to give up on life.

The family, Joe and Ruby arrive for dinner. Bucky suffers a stroke. In the hospital, Sam and Charlotte decide against divorce. Eleanor leaves her married lover for Joe. Hank's ex-wife finds him work. Emma feels grateful to have her family. Bucky, recovering, watches everyone dance.



## The Closer We Get

United Kingdom/Germany 2015  
 Director: Karen Guthrie  
 Certificate PG 91m 10s

### Reviewed by Leigh Singer

Although there have been recent Scottish documentaries dealing with long-festering personal trauma (*16 Years till Summer*) and caring for an incapacitated loved one (*The Possibilities Are Endless*, about Edwyn Collins), the film that Karen Guthrie's intimate project most brings to mind is Sarah Polley's acclaimed *Stories We Tell* (2012). Like Polley, Guthrie stages an investigation into the mysteries of her own parents' marriage: the buried emotional desires and heartaches repressed beneath the necessary appearance of a happy family, and the ripples these make as they are unearthed. Yet if Guthrie eschews Polley's self-reflexivity and climactic metafictional twist, it's not the absence of such ploys but rather the intransigence of the film's reluctant central participant that makes for a more frustrating cinematic experience.

Guthrie, who together with her filmmaking partner Nina Pope handles almost all camera and sound work here, starts the film with a series of epigrammatic voiceover statements, some of which ("I used to think bad things wouldn't happen to good people"; "I didn't know you could grow old overnight") seem awkwardly – perhaps even deliberately – unilluminating. Thankfully, her visual acuity and gradual, piecemeal relating of her family's history are far more assured. After her mother Ann's severe stroke, we see Guthrie and various family members in and out of the house, attempting to grapple with a wearying care routine. Her father Ian seems to be comfortably ensconced in this harsh new domestic reality; it's only later revealed that he has only recently returned from exile, unannounced and uninvited, to reinstall himself among them. Nobody asked why, Guthrie explains. It's just their family way.

This, then, becomes the film's central dramatic thrust – and enigma. Guthrie acknowledges early on that she shares with her father a certain wanderlust and avoidance of hard truths, but clearly she is more willing to stop and confront past actions than he is. Ian, a blustering yet elusive, emotionally cloistered patriarch, does occasionally submit to Karen's cautious Q&A sessions. But, with his



**Motherly love: *The Closer We Get***

head lowered and his answers maddeningly gnostic, he's an absence even when present. The bigger revelations – such as the existence of his half-Ethiopian son Campbell – are somehow less disturbing than the minutiae, such as the single blurred, joyless photograph sent home from his decade living in Africa.

Where Guthrie is far more successful – largely because her father is less crucial here – is in evoking the life of a family thrown together to adapt to illness. Her layered, shifting-focus compositions and nuanced framing convey the claustrophobic yet often isolated nature of a fractured domestic set-up, while Malcolm Middleton's insistent, increasingly dissonant score needles restlessly away. Poignant, too, is the disclosure that Guthrie had already started a project on her father's secret parallel life, with footage of a more lucid, embittered Ann before her stroke.

As with Guthrie's stymied last-act trip to Ethiopia, it's the fact of making the film, rather than the result, that is most likely to bring her family, if not the audience, a sense of comfort and closure. The revelation, held back until the closing credits, that Ann passed away in 2013 only reaffirms the feeling that, even in raw close-up, some answers – and people – remain desperately out of reach. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
 Karen Guthrie  
 Nina Pope  
**Written by**  
 Karen Guthrie  
**Director of Photography**  
 Nina Pope  
**Cinematography**

Karen Guthrie  
 Nina Pope  
**Edited by**  
 Alice Powell  
**Original Score**  
 Written, Arranged  
 and Produced by  
 Malcolm Middleton  
**Sound Design**

Doug Haywood  
 @Karen Guthrie  
 & Somewhere  
**Production Companies**  
 A Somewhere film  
 produced by Karen  
 Guthrie & Nina Pope

Developed with  
 support from Scottish  
 Documentary  
 Institute, Royal  
 College of Art,  
 Sources 2  
 Developed with  
 the support of the  
 Creative England

Development Fund:  
 British Film Institute,  
 Creative England  
 Produced with  
 support from  
 Arts Council  
 England, Splice  
 Crowd funded  
 by 333 generous

Indiegogo backers

**In Colour**  
**[1.78:1]**  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
 Somewhere.org

When her mother Ann suffers a debilitating stroke, filmmaker Karen Guthrie moves back into the family home in the town of Largs, on Scotland's west coast, to help care for her. Karen's father Ian, Ann's estranged husband, also moves back in, unannounced, to assist with Ann's care; Karen uses this as an opportunity to delve into the family secrets that led her parents to separate.

In the 1980s, Ian worked in Djibouti for ten years, while Ann looked after their four children back home. Unbeknown to them, Ian began a relationship with an Ethiopian woman and fathered a son, Campbell, whom he later brings home to

live with the rest of the family in Scotland.

Karen attempts to interview her family members, including Campbell, now a young adult. She learns about the destructive impact her father's actions had on the family, but is never able to get to the heart of this stubbornly enigmatic man. Ian informs the family that he's returning to Africa. Karen subsequently learns that he has finally married his long-time partner, though Ian does not want Ann to discover this.

Karen visits her father and his new spouse in Ethiopia, hoping to understand more about Ian's motivations, but she leaves frustrated. End credits reveal that Ann died in 2013.

## The Danish Girl

USA/United Kingdom/Denmark/Belgium/Japan 2015  
 Director: Tom Hooper

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Before production began, this adaptation of David Ebershoff's novel about Lili Elbe – the first woman to receive gender reassignment surgery – came in for heavy criticism for casting cis actor Eddie Redmayne in the role. The case is much the same as the one against Jared Leto in 2013's *Dallas Buyers Club*: casting a cis actor as a trans character is a disrespectful mockery not far from blackface, marginalises trans performers in general and leverages trans issues and pain to gain awards-season recognition for a cis cast and crew. Devil's advocate: given the film's particular narrative, there are compelling (if not necessarily convincing) arguments for Redmayne's casting. The real Lili Elbe (born Einar Wegener) successfully completed four surgeries but died three months afterwards; the film's version only has to undergo two surgeries, dying shortly after the second due to losing too much blood. This is the narrative of someone who, biologically, is a man for something like 80 per cent of the running time, so Redmayne's casting carries a certain logic beyond the financing pragmatics. On the other hand, it denies Lili's character her gender identity. Reader, the ball's in your court.

Ebershoff's novel heavily fictionalised Elbe's story and Lucinda Coxon's adaptation further tinkers with those spurious details. In reality, painter Einar (Redmayne) and wife Gerda (Alicia Vikander) had a fluid marriage long before Lili started questioning her gender identity. Gerda was openly lesbian, a far cry from this film's devoted wife caused pat pain by her husband's transition. In this respect, the narrative has been significantly de-queered from the get-go. Audiences are asked to sympathise with Lili not because she has the right to self-determination or experiences dysphoria, but because society, especially the hostile medical establishment, martyrs her in hissably odious ways (beatings, attempted institutionalisation etc); a messier sexual relationship might lose an easily shocked viewer at the start. Other distortions of Elbe's life are too numerous to detail here; suffice to say that her relationship to the public and self-presentation were both more complicated and open (Lili was a public, on-the-record figure, not a secret) than the familiar behind-closed-doors/persecution-on-the-streets torments depicted here.

*The Danish Girl* is effectively the story of One Woman's Suffering (two if you count Vikander's part, which requires little more than crying at the correct moments), its primary rhetorical appeal bathetic rather than intellectual. This might work in more emotionally skilled hands but the screenplay is a muddle, favouring heavy foreshadowing and blunt subtext; for example, an early mention of a childhood friend once lost in a bog serves double duty, paving the way for the second-act arrival of Matthias Schoenaerts's thus-planted character while also allowing Redmayne to say "The bog is within me" to underline his uncertainties about his sexual identity. After Lili's death, a scarf she owned flies out of Gerda's hands and up into the air above the cliffs, a symbol of her captive soul finally set free; the level of metaphor is similarly scene-to-scene clunky throughout.

Redmayne can't be faulted for not taking the



## Fathers & Daughters

USA/Italy 2014

Director: Gabriele Muccino

Certificate 15 116m 18s



Scenes from a marriage: Vikander, Redmayne

part seriously enough; he did his homework, spoke with numerous trans activists, and so on. The film is nonetheless staggeringly unengaging, even beyond the script's primary-school-level approach to overstatement. Working with his regular DP Danny Cohen, Tom Hooper again abuses the fisheye lens as an inexplicable go-to crutch for both close-ups and master shots, flubs basic eyeline match requirements and fails to generate any dramatic tension, relying on prefab emotional nudges. The relationship between husband and wife is very familiar and the supporting cast is similarly undercharacterised (dishonourable mention to Amber Heard as a blusteringly unconvincing, decidedly annoying bohemian).

*The Danish Girl* conveys that it means to be Moving and Powerful, and little more; in every damning sense, it's well intentioned, so dull as to not register even as it's unfolding. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Gail Mutrux Anne Harrison Tim Bevan Eric Fellner Tom Hooper	A Working Title/ Pretty Pictures production in association with ReVision Pictures and Senator Global Productions A film by Tom Hooper With the support of the Copenhagen Film Fund Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./ Fuji Television Network, Inc. In co-production with Artemis Productions, Shelter Prod. In association with Taxshelter.be With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique	Kathy Morgan Liza Chasin
<b>Screenplay</b> Lucinda Coxon Based on the book by David Ebershoff		
<b>Director of Photography</b> Danny Cohen		
<b>Editor</b> Melanie Ann Oliver		
<b>Production Designer</b> Eve Stewart		
<b>Music</b> Alexandre Desplat		
<b>Production Sound Mixer</b> Martin Beresford		
<b>Costume Designer</b> Paco Delgado		
©Universal Studios <b>Production Companies</b>	<b>Executive Producers</b> Linda Reisman Ulf Israel	<b>Cast</b> <b>Eddie Redmayne</b> Einar Wegener, 'Lili Elbe' <b>Alicia Vikander</b> Gerda Wegener <b>Ben Whishaw</b> Henrik <b>Sebastian Koch</b> Dr Kurt Warnekros <b>Amber Heard</b> Ulla <b>Matthias Schoenaerts</b> Hans  <b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1] <b>Part-subtitled</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

Copenhagen, 1926. Painters Einar and Gerda Wegener are happily married despite the former being more critically and commercially successful. Asked by his wife to model stockings and women's shoes to help her complete a portrait on time, Einar becomes aware of his feminine identity, 'Lili'. Einar seeks medical help for what he believes to be a medical condition but is shunned by hostile doctors. In Paris, he meets German doctor Warnekros, who offers to perform experimental gender-reassignment surgery. The first operation to remove Lili's male sex organs is successful, but during a second operation to create a vagina she loses too much blood and dies shortly afterwards.

### Reviewed by Anna Smith

"I don't care about reviews," protests author Jake Davis (Russell Crowe) when a critic writes that his second book "may as well have been in Aramaic, or better still, not written at all". Is this a pre-emptive strike? This sentimental drama from Gabriele Muccino, director of *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) and *Seven Pounds* (2008), is certainly a muddled affair, flitting erratically between two timelines as the widowed Jake struggles to bring up his young daughter Katie (Kylie Rogers) while the grown-up Katie (Amanda Seyfried) fights to help another troubled child (Quvenzhané Wallis) and hold down a relationship.

The story's time periods are so unclear that even the characters can't agree on them: Jake says he was in hospital for seven months following the car accident that killed his wife, but his brother-in-law William (Bruce Greenwood) repeatedly refers to it being a year. Overbearing classical music adds to the confusion, implying a dynastic melodrama, something that's supported by the glitzy appearance of William's wealthy home. Quieter scenes between father and daughter signal intentions towards a more character-driven relationship drama, and Crowe convinces as a loving dad if not a tortured author. As the story progresses, Jake's petulant, impetuous behaviour makes him increasingly less endearing, leaving Katie by default the film's heroine.

Aaron Paul as Katie's love interest Cameron is also miscast, as a writer who idolises Jake and whose interest in literature is conveyed by a few swift scenes of contrived, awkward dialogue (while Paul has received acclaim for his role in TV's *Breaking Bad*, he has yet to prove his versatility on the big screen). Cluttered with characters, Brad Desch's script does its high-profile actors few favours, save perhaps Wallis, whose largely mute role allows her to convey



Death of the author: Aaron Paul, Amanda Seyfried

wordless emotion and a growing attachment to the adult Katie, now a psychologist in training.

Tackling child psychology himself, Desch takes a simplistic approach to Katie's past. If any theme emerges amid all the family feuds of *Fathers & Daughters*, it's the notion that we are the product of our childhoods. While Jake's fate is not revealed until the film's final act, the adult Katie's abandonment issues are clearly signalled by her fear of commitment. There is an implication that her aunt Elizabeth (Diane Kruger) may have also had a hand in her trauma, but a scene in which a drunken Elizabeth looms ominously at the child's bedroom door is cut short, never to be referred to again. Thus the women in this film are either bitter, potentially abusive alcoholics or emotionally vulnerable bleeding hearts, never allowed to drink or have casual sex without dire consequences. And to offer as the answer to Katie's perceived problems a man much like her father is a patronising and deeply unsatisfying conclusion. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Nicolas Chartier Craig J. Flores Sherryl Clark <b>Written by</b> Brad Desch <b>Director of Photography</b> Shane Hurlbut <b>Edited by</b> Alexandro Rodriguez <b>Production Designer</b> Daniel Brian Clancy	<b>Music</b> Paulo Buonvino <b>Sound Mixer</b> Christopher Strollo <b>Costume Designer</b> Isis Mussenden  ©Fathers & Daughters Nevada, LLC <b>Production Companies</b> Voltage Pictures presents a Voltage	Films and Busted Shark production A film by Gabriele Muccino In association with Andrea Leone Films, Soundford Limited <b>Executive Producers</b> Russell Crowe Keith Rodger Richard Middleton Romilda De Luca	<b>Cast</b> <b>Russell Crowe</b> Jake Davis <b>Amanda Seyfried</b> Katie Davis <b>Aaron Paul</b> Cameron <b>Diane Kruger</b> Elizabeth <b>Quvenzhané Wallis</b> Lucy <b>Bruce Greenwood</b> William	<b>Janet McTeer</b> Carolyn <b>Kylie Rogers</b> young Katie <b>Jane Fonda</b> Teddy Stanton <b>Octavia Spencer</b> Doctor Corman	<b>Distributor</b> Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)
--	--	---	---	---	---

US, 1990. Author Jake Davis's wife is killed in a car accident and he is injured. As a result of his injuries, he is prone to seizures; advised to seek treatment, he spends seven months in hospital while his young daughter Katie is sent to live with her aunt Elizabeth and uncle William. Elizabeth resents Jake for the death of her sister. When Jake returns to take Katie home, Elizabeth and William offer to adopt her; Jake refuses.

Present day. Katie has one-night stands and drinks alone in bars. She is studying child psychology and trying to coax an abused and mute young girl to speak. She breaks protocol by taking her out of the office and teaching her to ride a bike.

The film flashes back to Katie's childhood. We see her bonding with her father but feeling neglected when he spends all his time on his new book, which is published to poor reviews and unfavourably

compared with his previous Pulitzer-winning work. After Jake becomes angry with William at a birthday party, the latter begins legal proceedings to adopt Katie, claiming that Jake is an unfit father.

The adult Katie makes progress with her patient but is sad when the case is passed on. She meets Cameron, an aspiring author who greatly admires Jake. They begin a relationship, though Katie has commitment issues.

Back to Katie's childhood, and the adoption case is dropped after William is revealed to be having an affair. Jake suffers a seizure in the bathroom; he slips and dies, leaving Katie in the care of an unhappy, alcoholic Elizabeth.

The adult Katie has sex with another man and deliberately allows Cameron to find out; he ends the relationship. Months later, Katie goes to find Cameron and declares her love. They reunite.



## Grandma

USA 2015  
Director: Paul Weitz  
Certificate 15 78m 42s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

It's perhaps damning with faint praise to observe that Paul Weitz is an American rarity in manifesting even a trace of interest in tackling contemporary social ills in a way that suggests genuine engagement rather than triumphant self-congratulation – globalism and corporate indifference towards employees in 2004's *In Good Company*, inequity and inherent classism in US universities in 2013's *Admission*. The conclusions Weitz reaches are tentative and unspecific, but it's refreshing to see, for example, *In Good Company*'s Dennis Quaid weighing up whether to take out a second mortgage to send his daughter to college – the kind of quotidian specifics that most Hollywood films pass over.

In interviews, Weitz has said that after directing *Admission* (adapted from the novel by Jean Hanff Korelitz), he was chagrined to realise that while his plays had had female protagonists front and centre, none of his previous films had. Accordingly, *Grandma* elevates Lily Tomlin from *Admission* supporting player to nearly the whole show. Her Elle Reid is an embittered poet once anthologised for her first-wave feminist poetry but now a historical curio. Still reeling from the death of her partner of 38 years, the often abrasive Elle is forced to dredge up empathy when granddaughter Sage (Julia Garner) shows up. Sage needs \$630 for an abortion, a figure that staggers Elle: "Where can you get a reasonably priced abortion these days?" She doesn't have the money, so the two women criss-cross LA to try to raise the sum from past friends and lovers: a tattoo-parlour worker (Laverne Cox); a former husband (Sam Elliott); and finally, out of sheer desperation, Sage's mother and Elle's daughter Judy (Marcia Gay Harden), a type-A corporate harriidan.

Sage knows precisely why she needs an abortion, and *Grandma* makes it clear that she's going to get it by film's end. It shouldn't be so surprising for an American movie to let a woman have an abortion without the end of the world ensuing, but it's a rare occurrence: for every *Obvious Child* (2014) there are far more films of the *Juno* or *Knocked Up* (both 2007) variety, in which the possibility is gingerly raised and then rejected. A recent Gallup poll indicated that half the American public is pro-choice – which hasn't prevented every Republican candidate from



Let's stick together: Julia Garner, Lily Tomlin

ritually trying to change what's been the law of the land since 1971. Making a film in which a woman isn't punished for wanting an abortion – indeed, is affirmed – shouldn't be such a big deal, but it's comparatively gutsy and right-on.

This unambiguous platform plank helps articulate the generational divide between Elle and Sage. In an attempt to raise money, Elle determines to sell her first-edition copies of *The Feminine Mystique* and other feminist touchstones, only to discover that Sage has no idea who Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir were, and that her books aren't worth the thousands she thought: feminism's pioneers are both literally and figuratively undervalued. Worse, Sage has a regressive sense of self, worrying that she's "a slut". Solidarity must be relearned, especially in a film where all the men are repulsed by the merest mention of abortion or even a vague allusion to menstruation.

Like all Weitz's films, *Grandma* is nothing much of note on a technical level, shot with inelegant handheld camerawork. Tomlin's character is a slightly more sophisticated variant of the tired 'bad grandma' trope introduced in *There's Something About Mary* (1998), and the film inevitably builds to a series of soft-focus reconciliations, capped with maudlin singer-songwriter balladry. Still, *Grandma*'s rhetorical clarity and unambiguous politics are heartening and bracing, and more moving than the narrative proper.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Andrew Miano  
Paul Weitz  
Paris Kassidokostas-Latsis  
Terry Douglas  
**Written by**  
Paul Weitz  
**Director of Photography**  
Tobias Datum  
**Edited by**  
Jonathan Corn

**Production Designers**  
Cindy Chao  
Michele Yu  
**Music**  
Joel P West  
**Sound Mixer**  
Vincent Jay Schelly  
**Costume Designer**  
Molly Grundman-Gerbosi  
@Papate, LLC

**Production Companies**  
An 1821 Media, Depth of Field production  
**Executive Producers**  
Stephanie Meurer  
Dan Balgoyen  
Danielle Renfrew  
Behrens

**Cast**  
Lily Tomlin

Elle Reid  
Julia Garner  
Sage  
Marcia Gay Harden  
Judy  
Judy Greer  
Olivia  
Laverne Cox  
Deathy  
Elizabeth Peña  
Carla  
Nat Wolff  
Cam

Sarah Burns  
protestor  
Colleen Camp  
Bonobo customer  
Lauren Tom  
doctor  
Judy Geeson  
Francesca  
Frank Collison  
Mike  
Sam Elliott  
Karl

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing UK

Los Angeles, the present. After breaking up with Olivia, her partner of four months, feminist poet Elle is surprised by the arrival of her granddaughter Sage. Having fallen pregnant by her shiftless boyfriend Cam, Sage needs \$630 for an abortion scheduled for later that day. She is scared to ask her workaholic mother Judy for

the money, but Elle is unable to give her the cash, having just paid off all her debts and cut up her credit cards. Elle and Sage approach a number of friends and former lovers for the cash, but without success. Finally they obtain the money from Judy. Judy comes to the clinic to pick up her daughter and reconciles with her mother.

## Grazing the Sky

Spain/Portugal/Mexico 2013  
Director: Horacio Alcalá  
Certificate U 87m 45s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

There are any number of captivating individual moments in this documentary on modern circus performers, whose artistry combines gymnastic prowess, balletic grace and the courage to put their bodies at considerable physical risk in front of an audience. There's the lone figure vertiginously descending a Turin lamppost; the quartet of 'vertical dancers' dangling off a building in Barcelona; another foursome ducking and diving around their compadre on a moving swing; or even just the individual élan of a young woman weaving through a suspended metal ring.

At moments such as these, it's easy to appreciate the sheer visual allure that drew Mexican director Horacio Alcalá to this subject. Unfortunately, however, the rest of this attractive yet infuriating feature doc illustrates the danger of falling too much in love with your material, as it struggles to accommodate the stories of no fewer than eight different international performers. Following Antonio and Alex, the trapeze duo regrouping after loose hands sent the former crashing to the ground, causing serious spinal injury and a lengthy recovery, might have been drama enough for one movie, and surely we should have spent more time with Fadi, the Palestinian who trains at the Vertigo circus school in Turin and then returns to the West Bank to provide a physical therapy class at a remedial school for victims of the local conflict. Instead, Alcalá criss-crosses the globe playing catch-up with all the other performers too.

The result is a film whose editing strategy makes you feel the 'random play' button has been pressed, mitigating against anything but the most superficial engagement with what should have been fascinating individual trajectories. You come out appreciating the dedication of these young people as they create a new artform, but wishing their efforts had a more coherent showcase.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Original Idea**  
Patrick Flynn  
**Cinematographer**  
David Palacios  
**Editor**  
Nacho Ruiz Capillas  
**Sound Design**  
James Muñoz

©Cámara Boreal  
**Production Companies**  
Cámara Boreal  
presents in co-production with Ukbar Films (Portugal), Color Space México  
With the support of

ICAA (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte - Gobierno de España), Programa Ibermedia, European Federation of Professional Circus Schools  
A film by Horacio Alcalá  
**Executive Producers**  
Horacio Alcalá  
Carlos Batres  
Aitor Echeverría  
Insausti

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Part-subtitled**  
**Distributor**  
Matchbox Films

A documentary featuring a number of young performers who work in the fast-changing world of modern circus, which is increasingly popular with worldwide audiences thanks to the success of Cirque du Soleil. These performers – acrobats, trapeze and rope artists and masters of the Cyr wheel, have learnt their skills on the job or in one of the new circus schools open to all-comers – a far cry from the days when such skills were passed down only within circus families. The danger of injury remains, however, as does the challenge of maintaining family life while constantly on the road.



## Heart like a Hand Grenade

Director: John Roecker  
Certificate 15 96m 43s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

In nearly every account of the first wave of 1970s punk, mainstream and prog rock are set up as its musical antagonist: glittering, self-important songs that lasted nearly ten minutes, overproduced with the assistance of multi-tiered synthesizers. (John Lydon's handmade 'I Hate Pink Floyd' T-shirt was nearly as significant in his being hired as lead singer of the Sex Pistols as his impromptu performance of Alice Cooper's 'I'm Eighteen'.) However, this hasn't stopped a few punk bands in the years since from dabbling in the 'rock opera' or concept album, the most notable examples being Hüsker Dü's 1984 *Zen Arcade* and Green Day's 2004 *American Idiot*. The former regularly appears in 'best of' lists by rock critics and musicians of all stripes, while the latter has become a Tony award-winning musical—accomplishments that are almost as anti-punk as observing a solemn moment of silence at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

Regardless of how much of an obnoxious poseur you might find lead singer Billy Joe Armstrong to be, there's not much insight into his creative process in John Roecker's film about the recording of *American Idiot*. Shot over nine months in 2003, *Heart like a Hand Grenade* documents the band's in-studio antics, mugging for the camera and rehearsals, as well as some rare footage of live shows. "I'm trying to get myself into the headspace of rocking out in front of the mirror when I was 14," says Armstrong as he listens to the already completed tracks of songs such as 'St Jimmy' and 'She's a Rebel'. Lest the former statement leave any doubts about the intended audience for this music, there's also a moment when Armstrong offers a heartfelt 'tutorial' for eighth-graders about how to drink without getting hungover. (He suggests the 'one bottle of water for every beer' method.)

Similarly, when the band discuss potential cover art for the album, producer Rob Cavallo immediately dismisses the notion of using a photograph of George W. Bush because it would be "too controversial" and "obvious". He insists, "It's a personal thing—we're all American idiots to a certain extent," and Armstrong suggests instead a symbol, like the one used on the album cover of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. (Yes, this is something the frontman of the most visible punk band of the past 20 years actually said.)

In other short interviews, the band discuss the meaning behind the album's lyrics, feelings of dissatisfaction that arose not from the post-9/11 infringement of civil liberties or the Iraq War but rather from a sense of being "confused" and "disenfranchised" by 24-hour news cable channels. It's the sort of broadly political statement that someone on the cusp of puberty can latch on to without truly offending their parents; with a technical prowess and polish that easily trump any mainstream pop acts (then or now), it's a type of music that, at the very least, opens the door to bigger or more aggressive attitudes/bands.

The same can't be said for Roecker's filmmaking. Serving as the sole camera operator—you know, that DIY punk aesthetic—what he captures isn't particularly visually interesting



Part-time punk: Billy Joe Armstrong

(there are a few cringe-inducing slow zooms on sad/focused faces) and it's stitched together in a way that's neither dynamic nor engaging. Worse, the filmmaker intercuts clunky found footage that doesn't really gel with the band or their music, the most egregious example being a nine-minute sequence that pairs 'Rich Man's Frug' from Bob Fosse's *Sweet Charity* with a performance of 'Jesus of Suburbia'. He also needlessly reimagines Bob Dylan's 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' video for the finished recording of 'American Idiot', but sticks a go-go dancing brunette wearing an American-flag bikini just left of the cue-card holder. (It's unclear if Roecker was trying to mimic Julien Temple's aesthetic and ran out of cash for rights, or was concerned that there weren't enough women in the film.)

What little concert footage there is would seem to be the main draw for fans but it feels strangely adrift, somewhere between too polished and not professional enough. Worse, these scenes are framed in a way that prevents the audience becoming involved as it does in Penelope Spheeris's *Decline and Fall of Western Civilization* series—or even Beyoncé's *The Mrs Carter Show World Tour*. ❖

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Billie Joe Armstrong  
John Roecker  
**Shot by**  
John Roecker  
**Edited by**  
Scott Gawlik  
Dean Gonzalez

**Music**  
Green Day  
**Sound**  
Chris Dugan

**Executive Producer**  
Pat Magnarella

**In Colour**  
  
**Distributor**  
BY Experience

Shot over nine months in 2003 during the recording of Green Day's *American Idiot* album, this documentary incorporates footage from the band's rehearsals, early concerts and studio sessions, as well as some staged and found footage.

## Hector

United Kingdom/France 2015  
Director: Jake Gavin  
Certificate 15 86m 47s

### Reviewed by Robert Hanks

From Chaplin's first appearance as the Little Tramp through to the end of the Great Depression, the hobos and down-and-outs that abounded in cinema—*Boudou Saved from Drowning*, *Hallelujah I'm a Bum*, *My Man Godfrey*, *Sullivan's Travels*—were figures of comedy and pathos, as well as subversive commentators on bourgeois morality. The movie tramps we get these days are perhaps more realistic, but a good deal less fun.

From the start of *Hector*, when the title character is encountered fastidiously cleaning himself, scrubbing his nails in the washroom of a Scottish motorway service station, it looks as if we are in for a sanitised view of homelessness. Some of Hector's companions, such as grouchy Dougie and young Hazel, who also sleep in the space at the back of the service station, may have experienced the darker sides of homelessness—mental illness, loneliness, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual abuse; in its anxious, generous portrayal of the homeless, the film seems to be setting itself up as an *Edna, the Inebriate Woman* or *Cathy Come Home* for the 21st century, or maybe *Ralph McTell's 'Streets of London': The Movie*. But in some ways it idealises life on the road. Peter Mullan's Hector is all flinty dignity and wry kindness—people warm to him, confide in him; if he has a vice, it is perhaps that he is too independent. His dealings with the state run smoothly—he collects his pension every week, has access to healthcare (near the start, he has a hospital appointment in Glasgow) and gets on all right with the police. There is no political urgency, and the closest we get to subversive is a drunken food fight at the shelter where Hector stays every Christmas.

The film has two strands: the first is Hector's annual pilgrimage south to the shelter, in London. Along the way he encounters insults and danger, though this is balanced by kindness: a car drives through a puddle to splash him as he limps along by a main road, but the next vehicle stops to commiserate and offer a lift. In Glasgow, muggers try to steal his wheelie bag, but a kindly shopkeeper (Hardeep Singh Kohli—one of a number of minor-celebrity



Bicycle griefs: Ewan Stewart, Peter Mullan



cameos) chases them off. On Merseyside, a café owner recommended by the local priest gives him extra helpings, chats amiably and fixes him a lift south, then suspects him of trying to rob her till, and throws him out.

The second strand has Hector, having been told he needs an operation, trying to contact his long-estranged family. In Newcastle, his petty-bourgeois car salesman brother-in-law (Stephen Tompkinson in what would once have been a natural role for Rodney Bewes) rebuffs him on his sister's behalf – while offering a handout, which Hector naturally disdains. It's clear that something awful drove Hector out of ordinary life and on to the road, and writer/director Jake Gavin's script tries to ratchet up some tension over the question of what it was. But the question never feels urgent, and the answer, though in real life it would be tragic, is dramatically inert.

The casting is well done, though the star cameos are distracting, and Mullan has an easy authority. But the film drifts in and wanders on again, leaving no emotional trace. **C**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Stephen Malt  
**Written by**  
Jake Gavin  
**Director of Photography**  
David Raedeker  
**Editor**  
Guy Bensley  
**Production Designer**  
Byron Broadbent  
**Original Score**  
Emily Barker  
**Sound Supervisor**  
Ben Young  
**Costume Designer**  
Denise Coombes

©Victor Productions Ltd  
**Production Companies**  
Urban Distribution  
International Airimage Productions, Goldfinch Productions and

Mallinson Film Productions present a Product of Malitsky production  
**Executive Producers**  
Ahmad Ahmadzadeh  
Kirsty Bell  
Nicky Kentish Barnes  
Kate McCreery

#### Cast

**Peter Mullan**  
Hector McAdam  
**Keith Allen**  
Jimbo  
**Natalie Gavin**  
Hazel  
**Sharon Rooney**  
young mother  
**Sarah Solemani**  
Sara  
**Ewan Stewart**  
Peter  
**Laurie Ventry**  
Doug  
**Stephen**

**Tompkinson**  
Derek  
**Gina McKee**  
Lizzie  
**Hardeep Singh Kohli**  
newsagent

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Miracle Communications Ltd

**UK, present day.** Hector 'Hec' McAdam is a pensioner who lives on the road, sleeping rough at motorway service stations. As his friends Dougie and Hazel head to London for Christmas, Hector hitches to Glasgow for a hospital appointment: he must return for an operation in the New Year, and it is clear that his condition is serious. He tries to contact his family, from whom he is estranged: in Newcastle he finds his brother-in-law Derek, who tells him that his sister Lizzie does not want to see him. On the road again, Hector runs into Dougie and Hazel at a service station. The next morning, Dougie is dead; Hazel flees in panic. Hector travels to Liverpool, then to London, where he is greeted as a regular at a Christmas shelter. His brother Peter, alerted by Lizzie, tracks him down and they reconcile. Hazel turns up, ill and exhausted.

Hector tells a worker at the shelter his story: 15 years earlier his wife and daughter were killed by a drunk driver on Christmas Eve; after being hospitalised, he abandoned his former life and took to the road. Lizzie arrives from Newcastle; they too reconcile, but Hector is determined to stay on the road. Christmas over, he heads north again to Glasgow, and the operation.

## The Honourable Rebel

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Mike Fraser  
Certificate PG 97m 13s

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

A vanity project advised by the subject's nephew, this semi-dramatised biography of aristocrat, sometime actress and WWII intelligence operative Elizabeth Montagu (1909-2002) eschews all subtlety in favour of a hagiography delivered in 'Allo 'Allo accents. A first-person voiceover adapted from Montagu's memoir (read by Diana Rigg) includes gems such as, "I've always wanted to do the right thing but that isn't because I was born an aristocrat." In places, the film seems no more than an extended advertisement for the period vehicles loaned by the Montagu family's Beaulieu National Motor Museum; and an embarrassing imitation of expressionist *noir* for a scene about Montagu's work on *The Third Man* underlines the film's uncineematic quality.

Montagu seems to have regarded her wartime experiences as "a jaunt on the Riviera Express", as someone here says. From Johnny Cannon in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) to the eponymous protagonist of *Charlotte Gray* (2001), the women on the front lines during World War II have been, deservedly, the subject of cinematic fascination, but Elizabeth Montagu is one among the many potential subjects still awaiting their due. **C**



Speak, memory: Dorothea Myer-Bennett

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Mike Fraser  
**Adapted for the Screen by**  
Mike Fraser  
Mary Stewart-David  
**Film Treatment**  
Charles Mosley  
From the book of the same name written by Elizabeth Montagu  
**Cinematographer**  
Peter Edwards  
**Editor**  
Rab Wilson  
**Production**

**Designer**  
Andrew Howe-Davies  
**Sound Recordist**  
David Brill  
**Costume Designer**  
Caroline Pitcher

©THRthefilm Limited  
**Production Company**  
THRthefilm  
Limited presents  
**Executive Producer**  
Graham Weston

**Cast**  
**Dorothea Myer-Bennett**  
Elizabeth 'Liza' Montagu

narrated by  
Diana Rigg

**In Colour and Black and White**  
[1.85:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Miracle Communications

A biography of Elizabeth Montagu, mixing interviews, a documentary voiceover (drawn from Montagu's memoir) and re-enactments of events in her life. Montagu was born in 1909, the second daughter of the 2nd Lord Montagu, but she gave up aristocratic life, first for the London stage and then to work as an ambulance driver in France during World War II. Crossing into Switzerland after a dangerous journey, she worked for British intelligence under the cover of a theatre company. After the war she was asked to work on a film about Allied soldiers, and subsequently also worked for Alexander Korda. She defended her brother against homosexuality charges, and was later employed in advertising. She was married to Arthur Varley while caring for her lover, pianist Renata Borgatti. Montagu died in 2002, aged 92.

## Ice and the Sky

France 2015  
Director: Luc Jacquet  
Certificate U 89m 4s

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Ten years after winning an Oscar for his nature documentary *March of the Penguins* (2005), French writer-director Luc Jacquet repairs again to the Antarctic. His latest documentary, *Ice and the Sky*, is as much about a journey as the earlier film: one man's voyage of geological discovery at the southernmost reaches of the Earth.

That man is glaciologist Claude Lorius – now 83 – who has spent a total of ten years in the territory if one combines the 22 polar missions he's embarked on over his lifetime. Thirty years ago Lorius was the first person to substantiate man's role in climate change, but his story goes further back than that, beginning in 1957, when he was chosen to travel to Antarctica as part of a global scientific initiative. Electing to remain a full year, Lorius would collect the first ever meteorological readings of the region.

Jacquet's decision to plot a chronological course through Lorius's life story is, if not imaginative, at least sensible. *Ice and the Sky* makes extensive use of 8mm archive film recorded during the above and subsequent missions, cutting away at intervals to new footage of a present-day Lorius walking in polar landscapes like some isolated oracle. The first-person narration, read compellingly by Michel Papineschi, not only relays Lorius's findings in the order they occurred, but also evokes the day-to-day business of survival and research – the smells of socks and kerosene. Given that so great a proportion of the film is constructed of archive material – shot against a white and featureless backdrop, spotted with machinery meaningless to the untrained eye – it makes academic sense to start at Charcot Station, the base camp of Lorius's first expedition. In this way, Jacquet gently inducts the audience into an unfamiliar world, one that for Lorius would become second nature.

If it strikes us that the younger Lorius resembles Peter Sellers (at other times, Roy Scheider), it's perhaps because his heroic exploits condition a viewer to fish for his Hollywood lookalike. Indeed, the 1950s colour footage doesn't so much remind one of early documentaries – *Nanook of the North* (1922), say, or *The Epic of Everest* (1924) – as presage later feature films. Certain scenes bring to mind the production design of *Snowpiercer* (2013), the claustrophobic, sci-fi spaces of *Alien* (1979) and *The Thing* (1982), and even the fellowship of *Jaws* (1975).

Jacquet's commitment to showing the scientist's thinking start-to-finish – putting us through *his* paces – pays off. Better than being told that Lorius is director emeritus of research at CNRS (such honours sound hollow to the layperson's ear), we observe his *being* there, his protracted physical labour, and this convinces us of his absolute authority, so that he may speak – at the film's conclusion – of "indisputable proof" and we believe him. More persuasive than any medal or accolade are the images of Lorius bunking underground in a single 'heated' room (still only 8°C) with his cabin-mates, or removing his gloves in freezing temperatures to screw a nut into the rigging of an observation tower; or the piled-up crates of food supplies, measuring out "a year of one's life" like Prufrock's coffee spoons.

The film is far from without flaw: its graphics



## The Last Witch Hunter

USA/People's Republic of China 2015

Director: Breck Eisner

Certificate 12A 106m 4s

### Reviewed by Tim Hayes

The influence of the role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons, created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in 1974, lurks in the background of many a current fantasy film venture. Its goal-orientated campaigns and modular roadmaps, now seasoned with the essence of Joseph Campbell and filtered through more sophisticated gaming platforms, animate that ghetto of screen fantasy fixated on digitally polished building blocks of night-time sorcery and battles between characters built from random offcuts at the bottom of the personality bin. *The Last Witch Hunter* closes this loop, by originating in Vin Diesel's enthusiasm for D&D and wish to bring a version of the game's style and tenor to the screen. As passion projects go, it's not exactly Warren Beatty and John Reed, but Diesel has always been an engaged custodian of his own taciturn persona and a canny chooser of collaborators, and the film shows all the signs of having been made to measure around its star's strengths and weaknesses.

But in this neck of the woods, a closed loop tends to become a Möbius strip of familiar borrowings. Diesel's immortal Kaulder, prowling modern-day New York, is an urbane echo of Christopher Lambert's rather shabbier Connor MacLeod in *Highlander* (1986); the hidden subculture of witches socialising in members-only bars is akin to the vampire societies in the *Blade* franchise; and the sorcery and general eschatology parallel *Constantine* (2005). Meanwhile the twentysomething witches in black clothes, stylish accessories and tattoos have one foot in *The Craft* (1996) and the other in the TV series *Charmed*, and so might have felt more at home if the film had been set on the West Coast rather than the East. Most brazenly, any interest Kaulder's esoteric employers may have in keeping their affairs under wraps is rather dented by his wheels, since he tools around at high revs in an Aston Martin Rapide – nonsensical for the character but in keeping for the star of *The Fast and the Furious* franchise.

Splitting the odd meaningful difference between all this and, say, *Dracula Untold* (2014)



Vin Helsing: Rose Leslie, Vin Diesel

– with which *Witch Hunter* shares two of its writers – isn't hard, but simply might not be worth it. These fictions are intentionally full of elements designed to resonate in sympathy with others embedded elsewhere in the cultural hive mind, so studying them for true originality is looking down the wrong end of the telescope. At least *The Last Witch Hunter* has the benefit of a modern-day setting, usually more engaging for sorcery than some anonymous Hyborian epoch, even if a hint that the witches are reacting against humans' abuse of the environment is quickly hustled off stage.

Director Breck Eisner made *Sahara* (2005), a minor element in Matthew McConaughey's tuning of his own macho image, but in comparison Diesel's version of the process is more coarse-grained than fine. He remains tough to truly warm to in any role except one. Fifteen years on, the only persona that fits Vin like a glove is still the one that's sly rather than just geologically stoic: Richard B. Riddick, star of his own tangled quests, who would have conned some passing dupe into sorting out the witches a long time ago. Ⓢ



Ebb and floe: Claude Lorius

are leaden and the newly shot footage is monotonous, using such predictable techniques as time-lapse and aerial photography. Less predictable, however, is its treatment of scepticism, the word being spoken for the first time in the last few minutes of the film. Unlike Al Gore's agonistic *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), there is no sense that this is one half of a conversation, thus making a powerful statement of its indifference to climate-change denial. But rather than being about fear, fault or oblivion, this film's narrative is one of passion, perseverance and a life's immeasurable contribution to scientific understanding.

The ending is similarly unexpected, as Lorius asserts, "I have faith." It's an empowering postscript, which primes the viewer to rise to the challenge of its final question: "Now that you know too, what are you going to do about it?" Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Richard Grandpierre

#### Written by

Luc Jacquet

#### Cinematography

Stéphane Martin

#### Editor

Stéphane

#### Original Music

Mazalaigie

#### Sound

Pascal Dedeye

François Fayard

Samy Bardet

Thierry Lebon

©Eskwad, Pathé  
Production, Wild

Touch Production,

Kering, CNRS Images

#### Production

Companies

Richard Grandpierre

and Jérôme

Seydoux present

an Eskwad and Wild

Touch Production

production in

co-production with

Pathé and Kering

With the

participation of OCS

Executive Producer

Frédéric Doniguan

voiceover

Michel Papineschi

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

Curzon Film World

French theatrical title

La Glace et le Ciel

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Mark Canton

Vin Diesel

Bernie Goldmann

#### Written by

Cory Goodman

Matt Sazama

Burk Sharpless

#### Director of

Photography

Dean Semler

#### Edited by

Dean Zimmerman

Chris Lebonzon

#### Production Designer

Julie Berghoff

#### Music

Steve Jablonsky

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Christopher Strollo

#### Costume Designer

Luca Mosca

#### Visual Effects

Rodeo FX

Cinesite

Visual Effects &

Animation

Luma Pictures

Method Studios

Image Engine

Big Sky Laboratories

©Summit

Entertainment, LLC

#### Production

Companies

Summit

Entertainment

presents in

association with

TIK Films a Mark

Canton, One Race

Films, Goldmann

Pictures production

#### Executive Producers

Adam Goldworm

Samantha Vincent

Ric Kidney

Qiyun Long

#### Cast

Vin Diesel

Kaulder

Elijah Wood

Dolan 37th

Rose Leslie

Chloe

Ólafur Darri

Ólafsson

Belial

Julie Engelbrecht

the witch queen

Michael Caine

Dolan 36th

Joseph Gilgun

Ellic

Isaac de Bankolé

Max Schlesinger

Michael Halsey

Grosette

Rena Owen

Glaeser

Lotte Verbeek

Helena

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

E1 Films

**The Dark Ages.** A group of warriors, including Kaulder, attack an evil Witch Queen in her lair. Kaulder kills her, but not before she curses him with immortality. He duly survives into present-day New York, where witches still exist as a secretive and mostly law-abiding subculture, policed by a religious fellowship called the Axe and Cross. Kaulder works for this order as a hunter of errant witches, assisted by an assigned priest known as the Dolan – the current holder of the title is the 36th to do so. When Dolan 36th is placed under a curse and apparently killed, Kaulder pursues the culprit, assisted by Dolan 37th. Chloe, a peaceful witch with the power to enter people's dreams, is drawn into the chase and becomes close to Kaulder. They uncover a plot to resurrect the Witch Queen and release a mystical plague, facilitated by the traitorous Dolan 37th. The Witch Queen's resurrection is successful, until Kaulder overcomes her and prepares to kill her permanently, knowing that it will mean his own death at last. Chloe persuades him to live on, by destroying the witch's body but putting her heart into safe storage. Kaulder and the recovered Dolan 36th return to independent witch-hunting, now joined by Chloe.

A documentary about the life and career of glaciologist Claude Lorius, whose scientific explorations of Antarctica proved mankind's role in climate change. The film includes archive footage of Lorius's research missions – from his first, in 1957 at the age of 23, to expeditions undertaken in the 1980s, when developments in drilling technology enabled him to extract samples of ice more than 400,000 years old. We also see footage of the scientist today, photographed in polar landscapes. The film's narration – spoken as from Lorius's perspective – explains the science behind his findings, which ultimately allowed him to detect an 800,000-year pattern of natural climate change and its disruption by global warming.



## The Lesson

Bulgaria/Greece/Germany 2014  
Directors: Kristina Grozeva, Petar Valchanov

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

A taut account of an ordinary woman's swift transit into abject financial desperation, *The Lesson* is at once deadly serious in its examination of the origins and impact of poverty and almost playful in terms of the sheer level of nervous tension it seeks to evoke in its protagonist and audience. A clear stylistic model is the cinema of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, whose films also apply the tactics of the crime thriller to broadly social-realist portrayals of lives sent awry by ill luck and poor judgement.

Initial scenes suggest that the lesson in question is going to be a junior allegory for adult mores along the lines of *The Winslow Boy*, as Nadezhda (Margita Gosheva), a strict teacher in a small Bulgarian town, attempts to establish which of her young pupils is guilty of petty theft. But the focus shifts swiftly to the financial situation of Nade herself, which, thanks to a wasteful husband and delayed payments from employers, is increasingly dire. When repossession of the house she shares with her husband and daughter becomes an imminent threat, Nade begins a determined search for funds, a quest so beset by setbacks that she comes to resemble an arthouse version of a computer-game character battling off foes in order to build up points.

The film is smart enough to emphasise, however, that one of the enemies Nade must fight is herself: aided by Gosheva's tremendously detailed and intelligent performance, it gives us a woman whose proud and headstrong nature obstructs and assists her by turn. Nade exists, moreover, in a society fraught with its own wobbles and inconsistencies, in which byzantine regulations and inflexible laws coexist with financial instability and institutional corruption. Her situation is rendered yet crueler by the context of a small town in which everyone knows everyone: her shady employer is acquainted with her father, her loan shark is related to one of her pupils and dangerously well acquainted with her own domestic set-up, and everyone knows that her husband is a hopeless drunk. The film is expert at suddenly revealing an unexpected but key connection: the police officer hanging out in the loan shark's back room; the colleague who lets Nade know that their employer has gone bust by turning up miserable, exhausted and possibly drunk in her classroom. Work is rife with emotion, and emotional relationships are work. Nade's father has money, but so rotten is her relationship with him and the vulgar girlfriend he has taken up with since her mother's death that engagement with the vile loan shark seems an easier out than the diplomacy required to keep it in the family. A possible underlying reason for this sensible woman taking up with such a useless husband, meanwhile, is hinted at by the latter's passing resemblance to Nade's father: did she replicate a dynamic she witnessed at home?

The process of throwing things in Nade's path – a miscommunicated amount of debt, a car breakdown, unexpected extra bank charges and uncooperative clerks – can feel a bit forced, as can the effort to keep her character ethically pure. If her climactic bank robbery can claim the authenticity of being drawn from a real Bulgarian news story, her miraculous acquisition



Shadow of a debt: Margita Gosheva

of a convincing replica gun just at the right time is stretching things. Elsewhere, some character notes are hit too hard to harmonise effectively with Gosheva's subtle work in the lead. It's a cheap gag to make Galya, the girlfriend of Nade's father, quite such a sluttily turned-out ditz ("This negative energy has blocked my chakras"), and the loan shark is scary enough without actually having a chainsaw sitting on his desk during one of Nade's visits.

On the other hand, these cartoonish flourishes do provide some levity amid the merciless screw-

turning. It's a terrific, cathartic surprise for the audience when Nade, deadpan as ever, strides into her father's hallway and defaces a large framed portrait of the hated Galya with black marker pen. Gosheva's performance creates its own drama by building up layers of self-protection and then showing them fall away. The sequence in which Nade just makes it to the bank only to be frustrated again and again might be overly managed in plot terms, but it allows the actress to present a masterclass in evoking the effects of intolerable strain on a closely controlled personality. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Bulgaria:  
Magdalena Ilieva  
Kristina Grozeva  
Petar Valchanov  
Greece:  
Konstantina  
Stavrianou  
Rena Vougioukalou

#### Writers

Kristina Grozeva  
Petar Valchanov

#### Director of Photography

Krum Rodriguez

#### Editor

Petar Valchanov  
Production Designer  
Vanina Geleva

#### Sound Recordists

Dobromir Hristoskov  
Veselin Zografov

#### Costume Designer

Kristina Tomova

©Abraxas Film, Graal  
Films, Little Wing,  
Screening Emotions

#### Production Companies

Abraxas Film present  
Abraxas Film in co-  
production with Graal  
Films, Little Wing,  
Screening Emotions  
Supported by

ZDF/Das kleine  
Fernsehspiel,  
American Foundation  
for Bulgaria, Central  
Cooperative Union  
Developed through  
MFI Script 2 Film  
Workshops

Executive Producers  
Magdalena Ilieva  
Kristina Grozeva

#### Cast

Margita Gosheva  
Nadezhda  
Ivan Barnev  
Mladen  
Ivan Savov  
Nadezhda's father  
Stefan Denolyubov  
moneylender  
Milena Ilieva  
Galya  
Andriya Todorova  
Poly Angelova  
Boris Doychinov  
Nikolay Todorov  
Vanina Geleva  
Hristina Cvetanova  
Peshka Maneva  
Ivanka Bratoveva

In Colour  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

#### Distributor

New Wave Films

Bulgarian  
theatrical title  
Urok

Bulgaria, the present. English teacher and translator Nadezhda tries and fails to find out which of her pupils has been stealing from the others. Meanwhile, her own finances are dwindling. Her feckless husband has failed to make repayments on their house, and repossession is threatened within days. Nadezhda seeks to borrow from her father, from whom she is largely estranged, but allows residual rage against him and his younger girlfriend to derail the process. She goes to a frightening loan shark for the money and manages to pay off the bank – but when an employer on whose payment she has been depending goes bankrupt, it is impossible for her to pay the loan shark back on time. He blackmails her into giving his underachieving nephew a better grade; she gives the entire class top marks. Another approach to her father fails when she fights with him and his girlfriend. The loan shark suggests that she pay him off with sexual favours and prostitution. She goes to the police, but recognises the officer as a friend of the loan shark and flees. She prepares herself to comply with the loan shark's proposition but can't go through with it. Instead she puts one of her stockings over her head and, armed with a toy gun confiscated from one of her pupils, robs the bank. She returns the full amount to the loan shark.

The next day, at school, Nadezhda hears a news report stating that the female perpetrator of a bank robbery is being sought. She catches one of her pupils in the act of going through his classmates' bags. She says nothing, and begins the class as normal.



## Paranormal Activity The Ghost Dimension

USA 2015, Director: Gregory Plotkin,  
Certificate 15 87m 58s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

This franchise entry picks up from the finish of the 1988-set *Paranormal Activity 3* (2011) – leaving *Paranormal Activity 4* (2012) and *Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones* (2014) as series sidetracks – with little Katie and Kristi, whose grown-up hauntings featured in *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and *Paranormal Activity 2* (2010), taken in by a sinister cult devoted to bringing a demon to Earth for nefarious purposes. Then, in 2013, a new set of characters find the footage and pore over it, leading to a few frissons as the creepy little girls on tape seem to describe the house that will be built on the site of theirs after it's burnt down, and even communicating with their latter-day equivalent, Leila.

Directed by Gregory Plotkin, who edited the earlier sequels, the new film is hampered by its uninspiring protagonists – concerned video-obsessive dad, obnoxious asshole uncle, Christian mom and new-agey hot aunt – who foolishly play with a haunted old video camera and as a result are beset by variable 3D effects. These hark back to the heyday of screen gimmicks, including the 'Ghost Viewer' of *13 Ghosts* (1960) and the 3D dream sequences of *The Mask* (1961), with bursts of stereoscopic business that make for cheap jumps and one genuinely eerie moment as an endless tunnel appears in a little girl's bedroom wall. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jason Blum  
Oren Peli

#### Screenplay

Jason Harry Pagan  
Andrew Deutschman  
Adam Robitel  
Gavin Heffernan

#### Story

Brantley Aufliff  
Jason Harry Pagan  
Andrew Deutschman  
Based on the film  
*Paranormal Activity*  
[2009] by Oren Peli

#### Director of

Photography

John Rutland

#### Edited by

Michel Aller

#### Production

Designer

Nathan Amondson

#### Sound Mixer

Walter Anderson

#### Costume Designer

Lisa Lovaas

©Paramount

Pictures Corporation

#### Production

Companies

Paramount

Pictures presents a

Blumhouse, Solana

Films, Room 101

#### Inc. production

Executive Producer

Steven Schneider

#### Cast

Chris J. Murray

Ryan

Brit Shaw

Emily

Ivy George

Leila

Dan Gill

Mike

Olivia Taylor Dudley

Skyler

Chloe Csengery

Katie

Jessica Brown

Kristi

Don McManus

Kent

Michael Krawic

Father Todd

Hallie Foote

Grandma Lois

Aiden Lovekamp

Hunter Rey

Cara Pifko

Julie

Mark Steger

Tobi

Rebecca Larsen

Moir

Dolby Digital

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Some screenings

presented in 3D

#### Distributor

Paramount

Pictures UK

Santa Rosa, California, 2013. Ryan and Emily welcome Ryan's brother Mike for the Christmas holidays. Mike finds an old video camera and a box of tapes – the camera seems to record supernatural phenomena. Ryan and Emily's daughter Leila starts speaking with Tobi, the demon who haunted the house's previous occupants. All attempts to understand or dispel the phenomena fail and Emily is instrumental in giving Tobi human form. All her family are killed.

## Peggy Guggenheim Art Addict

USA/United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Lisa Immordino Vreeland

### Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

It was Peggy Guggenheim herself who compared her art habit to an addiction, both in her own memoirs and in the taped interviews that form the backbone of this fascinating portrait. The tapes were discovered in a basement by the filmmaker Lisa Immordino Vreeland as she was researching her documentary, and they date from the last year of the legendary collector's life, when Jacqueline Bograd Weld was interviewing her for an authorised biography. This archive, once thought lost, is a major discovery, and Vreeland makes full use of her subject's first-person perspective and distinctive, lisping drawl – even when she has to add subtitles to make the words intelligible. That voice, like *that* name and the smell of untold wealth that rises off it like steam, immediately marks her out as an exotic oddity, yet her insights are sharp and clear, and belie her reputation (carefully nurtured) as a skittish and temperamental eccentric.

Vreeland's film closely follows Weld's interview, moving methodically through the decades of Guggenheim's life, from her early, restless years in the stultifying drawing rooms of socialite society to her blossoming in 1920s Paris, where she embraced, often literally, the giants of bohemia. These connections developed into a successful career as a gallerist in London and New York, though Guggenheim's greatest achievement was the swoop she made on Paris in 1940, when she managed to buy many key works by Picasso, Dalí and others and save them from the flames of the Nazi campaign against 'degenerate' art. Augmented by later work by US abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, this collection came to define her: after the war she moved to Venice, and lived and worked among her masterpieces for the rest of her life.

The interview tapes are a curse as well as a blessing for the film: their historical linearity limits Vreeland's ability to tease out constellations of ideas and foregrounds the older Guggenheim



Guardian of the gallery: Peggy Guggenheim

at the expense of her younger self. Although she speaks frankly about her insecurities, her promiscuity, her failed marriages and so on, her recollections are distanced by time, and Vreeland can only offer us tantalising glimpses of film archive and still photographs to hint at the huge reservoirs of energy and ambition that must have driven Guggenheim's early life. At 80, she herself was clearly content to accept the widely held view that she was a dilettante – a rich eccentric who didn't really know much about art – and Vreeland tends to let this idea pass unchallenged. It's hard to imagine an equivalent male figure being so diffident about their contribution to art history, or allowing themselves to be defined not by their ability to build a prodigious network of contacts but by the fact that they slept around.

But then, it's hard to imagine an equivalent male collector at all. Guggenheim's secret weapon was the fact that she was a woman, and could move among the more mountainous egos of modernism without threatening anyone's masculinity. Vreeland brings this out very clearly: although the film balances Guggenheim's achievements against the emotional cost she paid, it's clear that she was not really a helpless addict of art or anything else, but a talented and influential taste-maker who knew how to make things happen. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Stanley Buchtal  
David Koh

Dan Braun

#### Produced by

Lisa Immordino

Vreeland

#### Director of

Photography

Peter Trilling

#### Edited by

Bernadine Colish

Jed Parker

#### Music

Steven Argila

#### Supervising

Sound Editor

Eric Milano

©Dakota Group Ltd

#### Production

Companies

Dakota Group

Ltd, Fischio

Films, Submarine

Entertainment

in association with

Bob & Co present

A film by Lisa

Immordino Vreeland

Presented by Dakota

#### Group Ltd, Fischio

Films, Submarine

in association

with Bob & Co

This project was

completed with the

support of Women

Make Movies, Inc.

Made possible by

the New York State

Council on the Arts

#### Executive Producers

Maja Hoffman

Josh Braun

Bob Benton

#### Film Extracts

*A Night to*

*Remember* (1958)

*Max Ernst - Mein*

*Vagabundieren,*

*meine Unruhe* (1991)

*Testament of*

*Orpheus/Le*

*testament d'Orphée,*

*ou ne me demandez*

*pas pourquoi* (1960)

*The Blood of a*

*Poet/Le Sang d'un*

*Poète* (1930)

*Un chien andalou*

(1929)

#### *Dreams That Money*

*Can Buy* (1948)

*Spellbound* (1945)

*Giacometti A Man*

*Among Men/Alberto*

*Giacometti, un*

*homme parmi les*

*hommes* (1963)

*The Rape of*

*Europa* (2006)

*Death in Venice/*

*Morte a Venezia*

(1971)

*Summertime* (1955)

*The Wings of the*

*Dove* (1997)

*A Girl Called Jules/*

*La ragazza di nome*

*Giulio* (1970)

*8 X 8* (1957)

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Part-subtitled

#### Distributor

Dogwoof

#### End credits title

*Peggy Guggenheim:*

*Art Addict*

A documentary about the life of art collector and patron Peggy Guggenheim (1898-1979). The film is constructed around rediscovered audiotapes of Guggenheim recorded in the late 1970s by her official biographer Jacqueline Bograd Weld, as well as contextual interviews with art critics, friends and relatives.

Divided into historical sections, the film traces Guggenheim's progress from bored, recalcitrant scion of a wealthy family via her escape to a life of bohemian freedom in 1920s Paris to her self-made status as a champion of modernist art. As a young woman, Guggenheim courted artists and writers in Paris, and had a string of affairs as well as two marriages – to the writer Laurence Vail and the artist Max Ernst. She became a commercial gallerist and dealer, first in London and then in New York, but when World War II broke out she used her contacts and her wealth to buy up key works by Chagall, Dalí, Klee and others considered 'degenerate' by the Nazis; she also enabled several artists (including Ernst) to flee Europe for America.

This rescued collection then became the focus of her life; she bought a palazzo in Venice, where her art was displayed and where she continued to host artistic gatherings until her death. The museum remains a major attraction for art lovers.



## The Runner

USA 2015  
Director: Austin Stark  
Certificate 15 90m 5s

### Reviewed Alex Dudok de Wit

Louisiana, one of the US's most febrile states, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, one of the region's greatest ever catastrophes, serve as the backdrop to this, one of the duller political dramas of the year. Novice writer-director Austin Stark is uninterested in the big picture: his film is narrowly centred on Colin Pryce (Nicolas Cage), a congressman who purports to care passionately for local communities but is wholly absorbed in his own jejune private crises. All we're supposed to care about is whether Pryce will get over his booze problem and daddy issues and run for the Senate. The ramifications of the spill are irrelevant.

The film is written in lazy TV-drama shorthand. We know that Pryce is troubled because he goes for punishing jogs. His wife (a pastiche of Claire Underwood in *House of Cards*) schemes to obtain political power, though her motivations aren't clear. His beddable PR adviser shoots him come-hither looks across the room. Good actors are wasted on these roles. Cage does a serviceable job of playing himself, all wild-eyed outbursts and hammy sobbing; this is no return to form. His career is now so steeped in self-parody that returning were as tedious as go o'er. **C**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Bingo Gubelmann  
Benji Kohn  
Glenn Williamson  
Erika Hampson  
Chris Papavasiliou

**Written by**

Austin Stark

**Director of**

**Photography**

Elliot Davis

**Edited by**

Michael R. Miller

Lee Percy

**Production**

**Designer**

Michael Grasley

**Music**

The Newton Brothers

**Production**

**Sound Mixer**

Dick Hansen

**Costume Designer**

Amela Bakic

©The Runner, LLC

**Production**

**Companies**

Paper Street Films

presents a Paper

Street Films and

Back Lot Pictures

production

in association

with KGB Media

This production

participated in  
the New York  
State Governor's  
Office of Motion  
Picture & Television  
Development's  
Post Production  
Credit Program

**Executive**

**Producers**

Ruth Mutch

Sam Bisbee

Noah Millman

Tom Conigliaro

Galt Niederhoffer

Todd Cohen

**Cast**

**Nicolas Cage**

Congressman

Colin Pryce

**Sarah Paulson**

Kate Haber

**Connie Nielsen**

Deborah Pryce

**Wendell Pierce**

Frank Legrand

**Bryan Batt**

Mark Lavin

**Peter Fonda**

Rayne Pryce

**Dana Gourrier**

Daria Walker

**Christopher Berry**

Hal Prochiv

Louisiana, 2010. Following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, congressman Colin Pryce achieves national fame by campaigning for federal assistance for blighted local communities. His wife encourages him to run for the Senate, but he refuses funding from an oil lobbyist, and then a sex scandal scuppers his career. Pryce leaves his wife and hits the bottle. He begins an affair with his media adviser, who encourages him to continue campaigning at a grassroots level. Proving successful as an activist, Pryce decides to run for the Senate after all, on a platform of promoting local business.

## The Russian Woodpecker

USA/United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Chad Gracia

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"The authors of this film," announces an onscreen text at the start of *The Russian Woodpecker*, "in no way intend to injure relations between Ukraine, Belarus and Russia." The disclaimer is disingenuous. Later on we see the film's chief presenter, Ukrainian theatre designer Fedor Alexandrovich, telling the DP Artem Ryzhykov that the secret police have instructed him to include just such a statement. Since Alexandrovich spends much of the running time denouncing not only the USSR in the past but also Russia in the present ("It's the Soviet Union again, it's back"), recalling the genocidal Soviet-engineered Ukrainian famine of the early 1930s, and laying the blame for the catastrophic Chernobyl meltdown of 1986 firmly at the door of the Kremlin, it's clear that the welfare of Russian-Ukrainian relations is the last thing on his mind.

Central to Alexandrovich's thesis is a huge shining pyramidal device that still stands, now somewhat dilapidated, besides the ruins of the Chernobyl reactor. This structure, known as the Duga, was designed as a transmitter of a low-level radio signal that would disrupt western communications. However, the signal (whose monotonous 'tack-tack-tack' earned it the nickname the 'Russian Woodpecker')

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Mike Lerner  
Chad Gracia  
Ram Devineni  
**Cinematography**  
Artem Ryzhykov  
**Editing**  
Devin Tanchum  
Chad Gracia  
**Music**  
Composed by

Katya Mihailova  
**Sound Design/  
Editing/Mixing**  
John Gideon

©Chad Gracia  
**Production  
Companies**  
FilmBuff, Roast Beef  
Productions, Gracia  
Films, Rattapallax

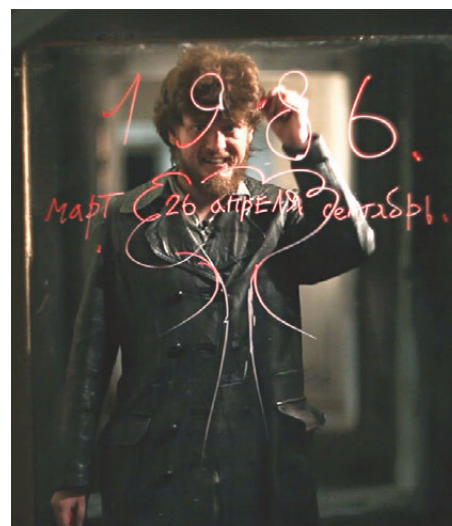
A film by Chad Gracia  
With generous  
support from the  
New York State  
Council on the Arts

**In Colour  
Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
DocHouse

On 26 April 1986, the Soviet nuclear reactor at Chernobyl in northern Ukraine went into meltdown, spreading fallout across most of Europe. The reactor was closed down and remains disused. In 2013, shortly before an outbreak of demonstrations in Ukraine against the regime of President Yanukovych, Kiev-based theatre designer Fedor Alexandrovich – who was four at the time of the disaster – decides to investigate what really happened and why. Visiting the site, he finds that it includes a huge radar transmitter. This device, he discovers, was designed to transmit a low-level signal across the globe (bouncing it off the ionosphere to overcome the earth's curvature) and was intended to disrupt western communications. Its monotonous 'tack-tack-tack' sound earned it the nickname 'the Russian Woodpecker'.

Alexandrovich interviews various elderly scientists and apparatchiks, most of whom remain warily tight-lipped. But he learns enough to conclude that the installation, though vastly expensive, never had a chance of working. He identifies the man responsible for setting it up as Vasily Shamshin, minister of communications in the Soviet government. Terrified that the uselessness of the Woodpecker would be revealed by an inspection scheduled for September 1986, and that he would be disgraced or worse, Shamshin gave the order that caused the reactor to melt down. Back in Kiev, Alexandrovich decides against travelling to Moscow to pursue his investigations. Meanwhile the demonstrations in Kiev have become an uprising; taking part, Alexandrovich publicly denounces Russia for its ruthless actions. Yanukovych is ousted. And the Woodpecker is back in action.



Bird of prey: Fedor Alexandrovich

also interfered with emergency calls within its homeland, so the frequency had to be changed – rendering it useless for its original purpose. The mastermind behind this 7bn-rouble project, Alexandrovich determines, was Soviet minister of communications Vasily Shamshin – and it was he who, fearing that a forthcoming inspection would reveal the Duga to be a white elephant, gave the order that caused the Chernobyl meltdown and spread nuclear fallout all across Europe.

"I realised," Ryzhykov tells us early on, "that [Alexandrovich] was from another world... Everything he does is theatre." Bug-eyed, shaggy-haired and impassioned, Alexandrovich makes a riveting, even barnstorming presenter, fuelled by a sense of personal slight; four at the time of the meltdown, he suffered the trauma of being temporarily sent away to an orphanage, and still has strontium in his bones. Chad Gracia, the Portuguese-American writer-director whose first film this is, describes it as "a tale of Ukraine's history and conflict through the eyes of an irradiated madman". Its story could well be written off as wild conspiracy theory, and one or two scenes – as when Alexandrovich, filmed we're told with a hidden camera, announces that he's turned chicken and wants to scrap the film – feel blatantly staged. But the parade of elderly, tight-lipped apparatchiks he interviews, stubbornly citing 'military secrets', lends credence to his thesis – as do certain more forthcoming witnesses, such as the historian who notes that all the archives about the disaster have been mysteriously lost and records of phone-calls falsified; or the head of the Chernobyl investigating committee, which insists that only deliberate action could have caused the meltdown, and only a direct order from the Kremlin could have instigated that action.

The film's impact is strengthened by intercutting the events on the Maidan in Kiev in 2014, where protest turned to revolution and the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych was finally ousted. "The undead Soviet ghoul," Alexandrovich warns the protesters from the Maidan stage, "a creature we didn't beat to death", is trying to stage a comeback. Gracia's film certainly strikes a formidable, if not lethal, blow. **C**



## Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse

USA 2015, Director: Christopher Landon  
Certificate 15 92m 35s

### Reviewed by Anton Bittel

Nearly everything you need to know about this knowingly juvenile romzomcom from Christopher Landon (*Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones*) is in its title, including the careless lack of possessive punctuation – although anyone patient enough to sit through the closing credits will get a different kind of apostrophe, when a severed zombie's head looks right into the camera and states with a resigned sigh, "Come on – the end."

Three male sophomore high schoolers (Tye Sheridan, Logan Miller and Joey Morgan) must use their scouting skills to survive/stop an undead onslaught while living out their adolescent fantasies (watching a stripper zombie! Groping a topless 'hot cop' zombie! Rifling through a teenage girl's underwear drawer! Fighting off literal pussy! Getting to practise kissing on a real adult cocktail waitress!) and their homosocial anxieties (having to use a zombie's penis for a handgrip!). Not unlike the Landon-scripted *Disturbia* (2007), this film surreally defamiliarises white middle-class American suburbia by repopulating its leafy streets with zombified neighbours – but with its heady mix of pooh and fart gags, sexual curiosity/abhorrence and explosive gore, this is strictly for viewers the same age (and gender) as the principal characters. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Todd Garner <b>Screenplay</b> Carrie Evans Emi Mochizuki Christopher Landon <b>Story</b> Carrie Evans Emi Mochizuki Lona Williams <b>Director of Photography</b> Brandon Trost <b>Edited by</b> Jim Page <b>Production Designer</b> Nathan Amondson <b>Music</b> Matthew Margeson <b>Sound Mixer</b> Steven A. Morrow <b>Costume Designer</b> Marylou Lim <b>Stunt Co-ordinator</b> Mike Gunther	participation of the State of California and the California Film Commission <b>Executive Producers</b> Samson Mucke Sean Robins Bryan Brucks  <b>Cast</b> <b>Tye Sheridan</b> Ben Goudy <b>David Koechner</b> Scout Leader Rogers <b>Cloris Leachman</b> Miss Fielder <b>Halston Sage</b> Kendall Grant <b>Logan Miller</b> Carter Grant <b>Joey Morgan</b> Augie Foster <b>Sarah Dumont</b> Denise Russo <b>Niki Koss</b> Chloe <b>Hiram A. Murray</b> Corporal Reeves <b>Lukas Gage</b> Travis  <b>Dolby Digital/ Datasat Digital Sound</b>	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Paramount Pictures UK
--	---	---

Deerfield, California, present day. After a janitor accidentally unleashes a zombie from a laboratory, teen boy scouts Ben, Carter and Augie set aside their differences and join forces with older strip-club cocktail waitress Denise. Under constant attack from undead townsfolk, they find out where Carter's sister Kendall and other seniors are secretly partying and launch a rescue mission, with a nuclear strike on the town imminent. Nobly planning to blow themselves up along with the zombies, the three boys are saved by Denise at the last minute. Having practised with Denise, Ben kisses Kendall.

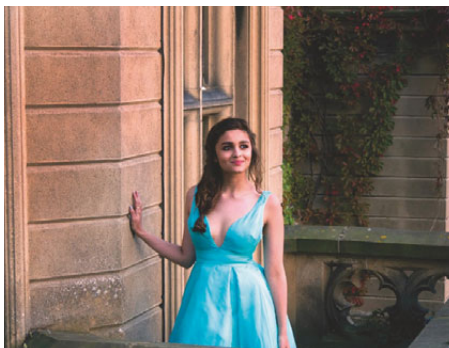
## Shaandaar

Director: Vikas Bahl  
Certificate 12A 141m 43s

### Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

Vikas Bahl directed the terrific female empowerment comedy-drama *Queen*, a sleeper hit of 2014, but now seems determined to move as far away from that film as possible. There are strong women for sure in *Shaandaar*, a comedy in which a wedding planner falls in love with the bride's sister: the bride is plump and unapologetic about it; her insomniac sister is a veritable Wikipedia of useless facts; and there is an evil grandmother determined to set her family fortunes right.

Bahl takes all these elements and places them in a deliberately magic-realist fairytale setting, thus admirably moving away from standard Bollywood wedding-movie tropes. But the result is a series of listless sequences that make little or no sense even when filtered through a zany prism – an absurd magic-mushroom scene follows a pointless skydiving episode, for example. The film comes to life only in the last act, when it moves into knockabout farce – though the conceit of a corpse being integral to proceedings is derived from the 1983 comedy classic *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*. **S**



Wedding planner: Alia Bhatt

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Karan Jonar Vikramaditya Motwane Anurag Kashyap <b>Screenplay</b> Anvita Dutt <b>Story</b> Vikas Bahl Chaitally Parmar <b>Director of Photography</b> Anil Mehta <b>Editor</b> Sanchari Das Mollick <b>Production Designer</b> Amrita Mahal <b>Music</b> Amit Trivedi <b>Sound Designers</b> Allwin Rego	<b>Sanjay Maurya</b> <b>Costume Designers</b> Archana Walavalkar Raquel Azevedo Ayesha Dasgupta  <b>Production Company</b> Dharma Productions <b>Executive Producer</b> Tanvi Gandhi  <b>Cast</b> <b>Shahid Kapoor</b> Jaginder Joginder <b>Alia Bhatt</b> Alia Arora <b>Pankaj Kapur</b> Bipin Arora <b>Sushma Seth</b> Mummiji	<b>Sanjay Kapoor</b> Harry Fundwani <b>Nika Walla</b> Geetu Arora <b>Sanah Kapoor</b> Isha Arora <b>Vikas Verma</b> Robin Fundwani  <b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1] <b>Subtitles</b>  <b>Distributor</b> 20th Century Fox International (UK)  Submitted running time: 142m 45s Cut by 1m 2s for category
---	---	---

England, the present. Indian families the Aroras and the Fundwanis gather at a castle for the wedding of overweight Isha Arora and gym buff Robin Fundwani. The Aroras are bankrupt and have spent their last cash on the wedding, hoping that the union will restore their fortunes. Wedding planner Jaginder and Isha's sister Alia, both insomniacs, fall in love and discover that they can send each other to sleep. Fed up with Robin's constant sniping about her weight, Isha walks out of the wedding. Robin's brother Harry tries to continue the ceremony at gunpoint but is outsmarted by Jaginder, who kidnaps Robin and helicopters the Aroras to safety. Robin reveals that the Fundwanis are bankrupt too.

## Shelter

USA/Switzerland 2014  
Director: Paul Bettany  
Certificate 18 105m 37s

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Paul Bettany's debut feature as writer-director concludes with the dedication: "For the couple who lived outside my building." In interviews, Bettany has said that this homeless couple disappeared after Hurricane Sandy; it's unclear whether he talked to them before that, and there's no suggestion that the film is based on their stories. Instead, it's a liberal *mea culpa*, a fairytale of New York that offers a soupçon of grittiness in order to make its fantastical conclusion seem believable, moral and cathartic. Hingeing on the anomalous character of Hannah – a wealthy white socialite who is living on the street and using heroin, despite her father's steadfast search for her – *Shelter* is a nod to O. Henry's sentimental short story 'The Gift of the Magi', in which a couple sacrifice their only beloved objects to buy each other gifts.

Hannah, who has left her son with her father, and Tahir, a Nigerian who has outstayed his visa, become an item. After a summer interlude in which Hannah quits heroin in a conveniently uninhabited three-storey apartment full of designer clothes, the couple spend a bitter (but terribly pretty, thanks to cinematographer Paula Huidobro) winter facing no room at the inn. Hannah's attempts to secure them housing include sex work; Tahir can't accept this and murders the security guard having sex with her. Dying, he conveniently frees her to return to her family, telling her: "I have a chance to do one good thing with my life." After pushing his body into the East River, Hannah somehow gets on a train, presumably home to her father. Thus, homelessness is resolved.

The characters and their relationship have been conveniently crafted to touch briefly on issues of immigration, geopolitics, Islamism, American militarism and American medical insurance, as well as the failure of the war on drugs and the inadequacies of the shelter system. Unlike Antonia Bird's *Safe* (1993), which grew out of the director's knowledge of the system and thus depicts a self-articulating homeless community, *Shelter* is an op-ed mishmash that honours neither its dedicatees, nor the characters derived from them, nor the talented actors in the lead roles.

While Jennifer Connelly's physical transformation into the wasted Hannah



Down and out in New York: Jennifer Connelly



will undoubtedly be celebrated, her embodiment of the role goes beyond stringy veins and stick legs. Despite the temptations to sentimentalise, she is an 'unlikeable' character – arch, forceful, selfish and a survivor. Anthony Mackie deserves more than his sidekick roles in *Captain America* and *The Hurt Locker*, but Tahir's backstory – he joined Boko Haram while mourning his murdered family – can't be permitted to go unpunished, and his character, constructed predominantly of flimsy pronouncements about faith, verges on the stereotype of the 'Magical Negro'.

In 2015, it should be no cause for special merit that an American independent film has an older female lead and a co-protagonist who is a black Muslim immigrant, that it features an interracial relationship, or that it tackles a major social issue without judgement. Yet while it's true that these aspects of the film do single it out – and remain importantly underrepresented – they are token ticks on a checklist rather than the seeds of a cohesive, organic narrative. In the hands of Ramin Bahrani or Kelly Reichardt, Hannah and Tahir could have been meaningful characters in a story that's more than a public service announcement. *Shelter* is inescapably a 'feelgood' film intent on rewarding the viewers (and filmmakers) for our seasonally flavoured pity. As a shelter for the couple outside Bettany's building, and to cover the larger complex social problem of homelessness, it is hopelessly inadequate. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Daniel Wagner  
Paul Bettany  
Katie Mustard  
Robert Ogden  
Barnum  
**Written by**  
Paul Bettany  
**Director of Photography**  
Paula Huidobro  
**Edited by**  
John F. Lyons  
**Production Designer**  
Tania Bijlani  
**Music**  
James Lavelle  
**Sound Mixer**  
Michael Sterkin  
**Costume Designer**  
Emma Potter

**@Repeat Offender**  
Productions, Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
Bifrost Pictures  
presents a Recidivist  
production in  
association with  
The Bridge Finance  
Company AG  
A film by Paul  
Bettany  
**Executive Producers**  
Melanie Green  
Dana Brown  
Clay Floren  
Aimee Shieh  
Kevin Frakes  
Cassian Elwes  
**Film Extracts**  
*Brief Encounter*  
(1945)

**Cast**  
Jennifer Connelly  
Hannah  
Anthony Mackie  
Tahir  
Bruce Altman  
Peter  
Steve Cirbus  
Jerry

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Arrow Films

New York, the present. Tahir, a Nigerian immigrant who has overstayed his visa, sees Hannah shooting up under a bridge, eventually preventing her from committing suicide. When they chance upon a house whose owners are on holiday, Hannah decides they'll stay so that she can kick heroin. Tahir cares for her, and they tell each other their backstories: she left her son with her father after her husband was killed on military duty; he joined Boko Haram after his family was murdered. A few months later, Hannah attends Narcotics Anonymous and she and Tahir have a hostel room, but they lose it when Tahir is hospitalised for asthma. Facing a storm and no shelter beds, Hannah accepts the offer of a boiler room from a security guard but is required to pay with sex. Moving Tahir into the room, Hannah undertakes further sex work to earn cash for medication and train tickets back to see her son. Tahir kills the guard and dies on the street; Hannah returns to her father's.

## The Show of Shows

Iceland/United Kingdom/Sweden 2015  
Director: Benedikt Erlingsson

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

This means of packaging archive footage – in a carefully ordered but deliberately contextless patchwork, with a score by a fashionable artist in place of a voiceover – has its frustrations but has become a significant way for viewers to engage with cinematic material that might otherwise moulder unseen by anyone but experts in the particular field. The field, in the case of *The Show of Shows*, has a big top pitched in it: these clips, ranging from across the world and dating from 1897 to well into the 20th century, cover aspects of the vaudeville and circus life. Performers are seen rehearsing, horsing around and mugging for the non-professional camera backstage, while more polished footage captures still-jaw-dropping acts of physical derring-do and cabaret turns of varying degrees of political incorrectness. Footage of audiences also features, and displays a striking diversity in terms of age and social status. The clips are loosely grouped, with sequences emphasising dancing, clowning, animal performances and acrobatic feats.

Cinema began its life as an attraction in travelling vaudeville shows, and at no point in its history has it wholly lost interest in its disreputable parent. The circus has been portrayed with various levels of affection, romantic yearning and fear in such features as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), *The Circus* (1928), *Freaks* (1935), *La strada* (1954), *Wings of Desire* (1987) and *Santa sangre* (1989), to name but a very few. The symbiotic relationship between the two forms is evident through this cavalcade of clips, with the circus wearing on its sleeve the preoccupations that its more respectable progeny may seek to mask or deny: sexual titillation and voyeurism; fascination with physical 'freaks'

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Margrét Jónsdóttir  
Mark Atkin  
Heather Croall  
Vanessa Toulmin  
**Editor**  
David Alexander  
Corno  
**Music**  
Georg Holm  
Hilmar Örn  
Hilmarrson  
Kjartan Dagur Holm  
Orri Páll Dyrason  
**Music Mixed by**  
Bergur Þórisson

**Production Companies**  
Produced by

Sagafilm, Crossover  
in association  
with The National  
Fairground Archive,  
The University  
of Sheffield  
BBC Storyville,  
BBC North  
Supported by  
Icelandic Film  
Centre, Atvinnuvega-  
og nýsköpunarrá-  
duneytið  
Financed by  
Icelandic Film  
Fund, SVT, RUV

**Executive Producers**  
Sagafilm:  
Ragnar Agnarsson

Þórhallur  
Gunnarsson  
Kjartan Þór  
Þórðarson  
BBC Storyville:  
Kate Townsend

**In Colour**  
[1.33:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

A compilation of archive footage, set to an original musical score. The on- and offstage antics of circus performers throughout the 20th century are depicted via a mix of home movies and professional footage. Show people rehearse backstage and parade their skills for the camera. Big tops are constructed and crowds assemble. Performers include people possessed of 'freakish' physical traits, dancers, strippers, acrobats, sword swallows, escapologists, a human cannonball, clowns and a wide array of animals. Child performers are shown boxing one another and participating in knife-throwing acts. Original sound features only during one clowning routine. The final collage of images is of audience members reacting.



Squeals on wheels: *The Show of Shows*

and aberrant behaviour; cathartic exposure to violence, danger and fear; the objectification and misuse of child and animal performers.

Much of the footage is simply impressive on the level of physical boldness and prowess. A high-wire walker tripping lightly between tall buildings long predates the famous Twin Towers stunt featured in *Man on Wire* (2008) and *The Walk* (2015); one trapeze artist, dangling upside down, supports another on a peg gripped between her teeth; a woman swallows a sword; a man fits a confounding number of eggs into his mouth. Some of it is intriguing for what it reveals about changing erotic preoccupations: complex underwear and its removal figure heavily, as do women costumed to evoke the harem or the slave market. There's also some distinctly intimate man-on-man wrestling in very brief trunks.

Many will flinch at the sequences showing knives being thrown at a chubby toddler, or small children fighting in a ring, but it's probably the animal content that most clashes with what might be deemed acceptable live entertainment within mainstream globalised culture today. The film unavoidably plays a double game with the inclusion of so much animal footage. It reminds us of what the appeal was, and benefits from that appeal, for unquestionably the human-like clothed chimps and cycling bears are fascinating, and the performing elephants are hypnotic to observe. Simultaneously, however, it calls on us to remember and acknowledge how merciless and mercenary this exploitation of wild creatures was, and where it continues. Perhaps to push the point, the largely orchestral score, by Georg Holm and Orri Páll Dyrason of Sigur Rós in collaboration with Hilmar Örn Hilmarrson, acquires some mournful choral vocals at this stage of the film. By far the most fun and pleasant animal clip is of a group of elephants, presumably on their day off, swimming and bathing in seawater.

As ever with this genre, the lack of specifics will frustrate minds of a factual turn: being intrigued by the clips carries with it the desire to know more about dates, locations and identities. The absence of interpretation or opinion, on the other hand, leaves ample space for the viewer to draw personal conclusions, or simply to bask in the spectacle. ☹

## Sleeping with Other People

USA 2015

Director: Leslye Headland

Certificate 15 101m 19s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If you were tickled by Jason Sudeikis explaining the art of 'fake chow' (pretending to perform cunnilingus) in the 2011 *Hall Pass* – the Farrelly brothers doing their best Apatow impression – then *Sleeping with Other People* is the movie for you. Sudeikis, playing serial philanderer and accidental dotcom millionaire Jake, here has the opportunity to explain 'the DJ', his record-scratch-style method for clitoral stimulation, while giving masturbation lessons to his best friend, Alison Brie's Lainey. If, however, you find the continual attempts to market Sudeikis as a viable comic lead baffling – as this writer does – you are recommended to give the sophomore feature by writer/director Leslye Headland a wide berth as it passes through cinemas.

Playwright-cum-filmmaker Headland broke through in pictures in the middle of the Apatow era with 2012's *Bachelorette*, a film that appeared in the wake of Paul Feig's *Bridesmaids* and to service a previously little-mined market for female-centric raunch comedy. It must be said that Headland – also credited as screenwriter on the 2014 *About Last Night* – has gotten somewhat more comfortable with blocking for the camera since her debut. And though it drags its heels a bit and wears its running time heavily, there are a handful of keeper moments in *Sleeping with Other People*, in particular an early scene where, over dinner, Lainey informs her boyfriend that she's been cheating on him. (Adam Brody, as the boyfriend, is one of a nice cast of supporting bit players that also includes Adam Scott and Jason Mantzoukas.)

Most of the aspects of the film that I found most off-putting – an overreliance on anodyne indie pablum on the soundtrack, its setting among the brunching Brooklynite set who seem never really to do a lick of work – can be written off as temperamental dislikes. It is heartening, at any rate, to see a filmmaker trying to connect to the legacy of the screwball comedy, one of the richest veins in all of American comedy, and Brie brings a winning vulnerability that recalls, in flashes, a young Shelley Long.



Love addicts: Alison Brie, Jason Sudeikis

But where Long had a Ted Danson to play off, and Myrna Loy a William Powell, here we run smack into Sudeikis, the star of *We're the Millers* (2013), two horrible *Horrible Bosses* films (2011, 2014) and not a single creditable comedy. He doesn't play his prolific cocksmith in his arch-eyebrowed satyr mode here, instead working somewhat closer to his recurring part opposite Tina Fey on the sitcom *30 Rock*, which means playing up his bland Midwestern amiability. His overwritten banter is, in the world of the film, irresistibly panty-peeling, but Sudeikis disappears when placed next to the really great comic flirts of the screen, among them the weedy and insinuating Woody Allen. The attraction between Jake and Lainey, which should have a tractor-beam pull, never registers in such a way as to make their final surrender a bliss-out. Without this sense of devouring desire, a famine before the feast, the stakes are never sufficiently high, and the movie can't soar when shackled to the millstone that is Jason Sudeikis. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Sidney Kimmel

Will Ferrell

#### Written by

Leslye Headland

#### Director of

Photography

Ben Kutchins

#### Edited by

Paul Frank

#### Production Designer

Amy Williams

#### Music

Andrew Feltenstein

John Nau

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Griffin Richardson

#### Costume Designer

Leah Katznelson

©Kimmel

Distribution, LLC

#### Production

Companies

IM Global and

Sidney Kimmel

Entertainment

present a Gloria

Sanchez production

A Leslye Headland

production

#### Executive Producers

Matt Berenson

Bruce Toll

Jim Tauber

Carla Hacken

#### Film Extracts

Misery (1990)

#### Cast

Jason Sudeikis

Jake

Alison Brie

Lainey

Adam Scott

Matthew

Jason Mantzoukas

Xander

Natasha Lyonne

Kara

Katherine Waterston

Emma

Adam Brody

Sam

Amanda Peet

Paula

Marc Blucas

Chris

Andrea Savage

Naomi

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Icon Film Distribution

New York, 2002. Jake and Lainey, two students at Columbia University, meet and lose their virginity to one another.

Twelve years later they are both still living in New York. She is having an affair with Matt, whom she met in college and who is now a gynaecologist. Jake and Lainey reconnect at a meeting for love addicts, and go out together shortly afterwards. Realising that they both have a tendency to sabotage relationships with sex, they decide to pursue a platonic friendship. Jake supports Lainey in her efforts to break off her affair with Matt. While Lainey prepares to leave for medical school in Michigan, their friendship grows to an almost domestic intimacy, until Lainey begins seeing a divorced father, and Jake starts dating his boss Paula. Jake and Lainey say their goodbyes, but when Jake is brunching with Paula, he catches sight of Matt and assaults him. This causes Paula to doubt Jake's loyalty, and she leaves him in the hands of the police. From the station, Jake calls Lainey in Michigan, and they confess their love for one another. Lainey persuades Matt to drop the assault charges against Jake. She and Jake head off to be married, but not before recommitting their relationship.

## Snoopy and Charlie Brown The Peanuts Movie

USA 2015, Director: Steve Martino, Certificate U 93m 25s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The greatest run in post-war American cartooning ended on 13 February 2000, when the last Sunday *Peanuts* was published the day after the death of its creator, Minnesota-born Charles 'Sparky' Schulz. While Schulz-penned *Peanuts* strips have never since ceased to run in syndication, the arrival of *Snoopy and Charlie Brown: The Peanuts Movie* marks the first significant attempt since his passing to continue telling stories featuring his characters. The driving forces behind it are Schulz's son Craig, CEO of Creative Associates, the company that manages the licensing of the *Peanuts* gang, and his grandson Bryan, a screenwriter whose sole previous credit is something called *Left 4 Dead: The Movie*. Discussing the project, both men have cited the importance of protecting Sparky's legacy, though of course this means *their idea* of what that legacy is – you may recall the kerfuffle over David Michaelis's excellent 2007 biography of Schulz, which was pointedly not for sale at the Charles M. Schulz Museum in Sonoma County when I visited.

To the credit of *The Peanuts Movie*, director Steve Martino and his crew at Blue Sky Studios (home of the *Ice Age* and *Rio* franchises), they have cracked a problem that has plagued adaptations of comic strips in the computer-animation era: retaining the artist's signature line. Unlike the live-action/CG combinations *Garfield* (2004) and *Marmaduke* (2010) – neither sourced from a strip of any distinction – the wholly-CG *Peanuts Movie* goes to great lengths to retain Schulz's style. Every attitude – Snoopy's blissed-out, ears-in-the-air dancing, Lucy's "You blockhead!" bark, Charlie Brown's expression of squiggle-mouthed woe – has been traced from the Schulz template, and will be familiar to readers of the strip. Characters are seen only in frontal or profile perspectives, never in the round, approximating the flatness of the newspaper page and the series of popular cel-animated specials by Schulz and Bill Melendez that began with 1965's *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. (Given the deliberate two-dimensionality of *The Peanuts Movie*, the decision to release it in RealD 3D can't be attributed to anything but ticket gouging by Twentieth Century Fox.) The voice of the late Melendez is even sampled in *The Peanuts Movie*, providing the telegraphic squeaks of Snoopy and Woodstock; also heard are Vince Guaraldi's signature piano compositions.

The concessions to modern taste have been relatively minor: a drippy Meghan Trainor song joins Guaraldi on the soundtrack, and a bit too much has been made of Snoopy's periodic fanciful hunts for the Red Baron, as it is practically a given that any kiddie film must have at least one theme-park set piece. A friend, after the screening, commented that the whole thing was rather too "heteronormative", which was my cue to slowly back towards the escalator. But the fidelity of *The Peanuts Movie* is part of what makes it so disappointing. It looks like Schulz and it sounds like Schulz, it even has his forged signature on the title card, yet something vital is missing. Perhaps it's ultimately futile for a \$100m committee-made work to try to reproduce the intimacy of an artist's psychological denuding on the drafting table. (Rather than attempt such creative necromancy, better to invest



in contemporary talents such as *Inside Out*'s Pete Doctor – like Schulz, a hockey-obsessive son of Minnesota with a particular knack for comprehending child psychology.)

Perhaps all of us who love *Peanuts* have our own version of what Schulz's art is: for cartoonist Ivan Brunetti, it's "an epic haiku"; for Umberto Eco, it's "the monstrous infantile reductions of all the neuroses of a modern citizen of industrial civilisation". For Schulz son and grandson, it's clear, the legacy of Schulz is of the simple, wholesome 'happiness is a warm puppy' variety, familiar and comforting as Linus's security blanket. Good grief. ☺

#### Snoopy and Charlie Brown: The Peanuts Movie



#### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Craig Schulz  
Bryan Schulz  
Cornelius Uliano  
Paul Feig  
Michael J. Travers

**Screenplay**  
Craig Schulz  
Bryan Schulz  
Cornelius Uliano  
Based upon the comic strip by Charles M. Schulz

**Cinematographer**  
Renato Falcão

**Editor**  
Randy Trager

**Art Director**  
Nash Dunnigan

**Music**  
Christophe Beck

**Supervising Sound Designer**  
Randy Thom

**Animators**  
Nick Bruno  
Scott Carroll

©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

**Production**

**Companies**  
Twentieth Century Fox Animation  
presents a Blue Sky Studios production

**Voice Cast**  
**Noah Schnapp**  
Charlie Brown  
**Hadley Belle Miller**  
Lucy

**Mariel Sheets**  
Sally

**Alex Garfin**  
Linus

**Francesca Angelucci Capaldi**  
the little red-haired girl

**Venus Omega Schultheis**  
Peppermint Patty

**Rebecca Bloom**  
Marcie

**Marleik 'Mar' Walker**  
Franklin

**Noah Johnston**  
Schroeder

**Madsyn Shipman**  
Violet

**Anastasia Bredikhina**  
Patty  
**Micah Revelli**  
little kid  
**AJ Tecce**  
Pigpen

**William 'Alex' Wunsch**  
Shermy

**Troy 'Trombone Shorty' Andrews**  
Miss Othmar

**Kristin Chenoweth**  
Fifi

**Bill Melendez**  
Snoopy/Woodstock

**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour  
[1.85:1]

**Some screenings presented in 3D**

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox International (UK)

**US theatrical title**  
**The Peanuts Movie**

An American suburb. As snow falls and a day off school is declared, chronic failure Charlie Brown attempts to fly a kite and, predictably, gets it stuck in a tree. The other neighbourhood children gather to see the arrival of a new kid on the block, the Little Red-Haired Girl, upon whom Charlie develops a tongue-tied crush. He takes his problem to classmate Lucy's 'Psychiatric Help' booth, and she gives him a self-help book that will supposedly build his confidence. Charlie's various attempts to follow its advice fail, but when he unexpectedly receives a perfect score on a test, he briefly becomes the hero of the school. As Charlie pursues the Little Red-Haired Girl, his dog Snoopy imagines himself as a WWI flying ace, on a mission to free his own beloved, Fifi, from the grasp of the Red Baron. Finally, during a school assembly to celebrate Charlie's academic success, he discovers that the plaudits bestowed him are the result of an error, and confesses this in front of an auditorium full of his peers. The Little Red-Haired Girl is silently impressed, and on the day before the summer vacation, she chooses Charlie as her pen pal.

## Soaked in Bleach

Director: Benjamin Statler  
Certificate 15 89m 30s

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Was the 1994 death of Kurt Cobain, ruled a suicide by the Seattle PD on the same day the body was discovered, in fact deserving of further investigation? It's a bit outside my pay grade, but judging from the various authoritative forensic experts trotted out by filmmaker Benjamin Statler in his docudrama *Soaked in Bleach*, I'll say "maybe". Is *Soaked in Bleach* in any respect an artistically satisfying or necessary movie? The best that can be said for it is that it's a slightly less appalling tribute to Cobain's memory than the lumpy statue of the Nirvana frontman unveiled in his hometown of Aberdeen, Washington, last year, on the 20th anniversary of his decease.

Cobain is briefly portrayed as a Jordan Catalano-like hunk by one Tyler Bryan in *Soaked in Bleach*'s sub-*Unsolved Mysteries* re-enactment scenes, which occasionally incorporate the audio recordings made by private investigator Tom Grant, whose conclusions in his ongoing enquiry into the circumstances of Cobain's death largely guide the proceedings here. (Grant is played by Daniel Roebuck, while Sarah Scott's kinderwhore slattern Courtney Love provides whatever value the film has as camp.) Nick Broomfield's 1998 *Kurt & Courtney*, on which Grant acted as a consultant, is featured and briefly rebuffed, though you may find yourself almost nostalgic for Broomfield's oleaginous muckraking by the time an epitaph from 'On a Plain' appears. ☹



Sappy: Tyler Bryan

#### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Benjamin Statler  
Richard Middleton  
Donnie Eichar

**Written by**  
Benjamin Statler  
Donnie Eichar  
Richard Middleton

**Director of Photography**  
Ben Kutchins

**Editor**  
Javier Alvarez

**David Moritz**  
**Production Designer**  
Jessica Kender

**Music**  
Peter G. Adams

**Supervising Sound Editor**  
Steve Ticknor

**Costume Designer**  
Bonnie Stauch

**Production**

**Companies**  
A Valiant and Daredevil Films production

**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Independent Distribution

A docudrama based on the investigations of PI Tom Grant, who was hired by Courtney Love to find her husband, Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain, in the days before his death in 1994. Combining talking-head interviews and re-enactments which incorporate audio recordings Grant made at the time, the film argues that the Seattle police department was overly hasty in ruling Cobain's death a suicide, and that there may have been a conspiracy by Love or others to kill him before he could commence divorce proceedings and nullify his pre-nuptial agreement with Love.

## Sparks and Embers

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Gavin Boyter

#### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's the kind of set-up that you might hear on an afternoon BBC radio drama: old flames meet one last time before she gets on the train that will take her away from him to the next chapter of her life. In this instance, Annelise Hesme's Eloise tells her ex – Kris Marshall's A&R man Tom – that he has less than 90 minutes before she has to depart, which seems a fairly tight timescale if he's to get her to change her mind about the big move and win her heart all over again.

Richard Linklater allowed his characters a slightly broader time span for the life-changing meeting at the heart of *Before Sunrise* (1995), though that first stop on his romantic trilogy seems to be the prime influence on the walk-and-talk playing out here on a Thameside route (mazily nonsensical to Londoners in the geographical know, by the way) featuring sundry cinegenic landmarks such as Tate Modern, the Royal Festival Hall and the secondhand bookstall area where Michael Maloney opened his heart to Juliet Stevenson in *Truly Madly Deeply* (1990). With the Christmas lights twinkling, all this is evidently a workable romcom context, but it puts a lot of pressure on the writing to shift right through the gears in short order, and director Gavin Boyter's script, while pleasing enough to avoid the loudest clunks, never lets us forget the essential contrivance at work.

With ample small-screen experience behind him, leading man Marshall is clearly comfortable with the light banter required, and casting slightly brittle French actress Hesme opposite him is an interesting choice, aiming for an opposites-attract sort of frisson but ultimately lacking in appreciable chemistry. That much is obvious the longer we see them stuck in a lift together during



Get up and go: Annelise Hesme, Kris Marshall

the lengthy flashback threaded through the present-day scenes. She's the financial consultant whose advice has just lost him his job at a record company; in the course of a forced close-quarters getting-to-know-you, tinglings of mutual desire make themselves felt, even if the audience never really buys it. Since their Bankside leave-taking leads them to realise that they somehow miss the ordinary everyday bits and pieces of their former lives together, surely it would have made more narrative sense to cut back to those quotidian moments in love? Instead, as if the 90-minute ticking clock weren't enough of a contrivance, cutting back to a stuck-in-a-lift meet cute proves even more phoney and off-putting.

That said, Boyter's film has its moments, notably in an amusing, painfully credible scene with Marshall desperately trying to memorise Eloise's phone number until he gets a pen that works; and there's a deftly conceived finale involving a Christmas gift whose contents are far from guessable yet are to play a key role in the denouement. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Benjamin Craig

Alan Latham

#### Written by

Gavin Boyter

#### Director of

Photography

Brian Strange

#### Editor

Guy Ducker

#### Production

Designer

Alex Ward

#### Original Music

Composed,

Arranged and

Conducted by

Dimitri Scarlato

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Ludovic Lasserre

#### Costume Designer

Nadia Dunn-Hill

©Sparks and

Embers Limited

#### Production

Companies

GSP Studios

presents in

association

with Gloucester

Place Films and

#### International

Pictures Three and

Premiere Picture and

Tall Trees Pictures

a Cinemagine

production

#### Executive

Producers

Nigel Thomas

Charlotte Walls

Kirsty Bell

Paul Rogers

Jason Garrett

Christopher Mould

David Rogers

#### Cast

Kris Marshall

Tom Sanger

Annelise Hesme

Eloise Martin

Waleed Akhtar

Tariq Haq

Valda Aviks

Rosa the rose seller

Sean Baker

Kenneth Fenton

Len Trusty

Mike Kusah

Kapil Arun Parikh

Faisal Haq

#### In Colour

#### Distributor

Bulldog Film

Distribution

London, present day. Tom is meeting ex-girlfriend Eloise at a riverside pub for one last Christmas drink before she leaves for France to live with her new partner Bill. They have 87 minutes before her train leaves. Intercut with this present encounter are flashbacks to five years earlier. Tom has just been made redundant from his job as an A&R man at a large record company; after clearing his desk, he becomes stuck for several hours in a lift with Eloise – the financial consultant whose restructuring plans have lost him his job. Initial mistrust and antipathy turn to sexual attraction.

Tom and Eloise leave the pub and wander along the riverside. Tom recalls the impact of their break-up and his subsequent suicide attempt; Eloise claims to be happier with her new partner, who is more stable than the immature Tom. Tom gives Eloise a parting Christmas gift. She catches her train and unwraps the present: headphones and a portable music player containing Tom's rendition of her favourite Françoise Hardy song and a message fondly recalling their time together.

## The Sweet Escape

France 2015

Director: Bruno Podalydès

Certificate 15 104m 55s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

From a pair of idiosyncratic Gaston Leroux adaptations to a segment for the portmanteau film *Paris je t'aime* (2006) and the comedy *Grammy's Funeral* (2012), multi-hyphenate Bruno Podalydès has specialised in a distinctly low-key, nonchalant brand of whimsy. *The Sweet Escape* sees him promote himself from perpetual background player to bumbling lead, playing a chronic dreamer whose middle-aged drift is wryly visualised by the recurrent image of a man floating slowly downstream in a kayak. It offers an oddly becalmed portrait of male midlife crisis in the great outdoors – no Harley-Davidson escapades or macho mountain-scaling here, but rather a largely sedentary journey in which little actual progress is made other than of the moderately spiritual kind. Nicely performed – although Podalydès's guileless protagonist is likely an acquired taste – its initial effervescence is sustained only for so long before giving way to a somewhat taxing, overwhelming sex comedy.

Having just turned 50, suburbanite Michel (Podalydès) maintains a contented if passionless marriage with his wife Rachelle (a terrific Sandrine Kiberlain) – their two children having long fled the nest. An aviation fanatic who sleepwalks through his job as a graphic designer, Michel fantasises about leading the freewheeling life of an airmail pilot (the first 'essential' item he packs for his adventure is a copy of Saint-Exupéry's *Night Flight*). It's typical of the film's gently irreverent trajectory that a seemingly random business pep talk on palindromes given by Michel's boss (played by the filmmaker's brother and Comédie-Française stalwart Denis) proves the catalyst for Michel's revelatory brainwave: the substitution of a kayak for an aeroplane. (The film's French title, *Comme un avion*, stems from the Charlélie Couture song 'Comme un avion sans ailes' – 'Like a Plane Without Wings'.)

Michel decides to spend a self-sufficient week gliding along rural backwaters, but has barely begun when he takes extended shore leave at a bohemian al fresco restaurant run by vivacious widow Laetitia (Agnès Jaoui). Sending indecipherable snaps to Rachelle to conceal his lack of headway, he finds himself – in an almost Buñuelian manner – unable to depart this



Blazing paddles: Bruno Podalydès

oddball idyll, no matter how hard he tries. That Michel grows to relish stasis instead of forward momentum is humorously at odds with the boxed-in character we first meet, who constantly yearns for movement and animation. But he's also, it seems, seeking an overall lightness of being that the restaurant impasse helps to cultivate.

Even so, he remains a passive, detached figure. Podalydès and DP Claire Mathon regularly forge witty visual partitions between Michel and the women he encounters: an iPad separating the faces of spouses; the kayak's ginormous cardboard box forming a makeshift confession booth for a randy neighbour in an elevator; a wooden plank that becomes a chastity checkpoint. Michel's bucolic dalliances have a faint echo of the Rohmer of *Claire's Knee* (1970), although a mostly innocent meeting with a lovelorn young waitress (Vimala Pons) who's also enamoured of old-fashioned planes lands on the wrong side of quirky.

Both Pons and especially Jaoui are good value but their characters are hardly fleshed out. The same applies to those on the periphery of Podalydès's ensemble: a pair of wacky, absinthe-guzzling handymen have limited appeal, although a recurring gag featuring Pierre Arditi – playing himself as an ornery fisherman – elicits laughs. Throughout, there's a sense that Podalydès is encouraging us to 'go with the flow' in the same way that Michel is advised to do. It's a play that occasionally bears fruit but eventually enervates. For all the tentative enlightenment on show, the prospect of just another suburban malcontent getting his rural rocks off isn't exactly nirvana. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Written by

Bruno Podalydès

#### Director of

Photography

Claire Mathon

#### Editor

Christel Dewynter

#### Art Director

Guillaume Deviercy

#### Sound Recordist

Laurent Poirier

#### Costumes

Dorothée Guiraud

©Why Not

Productions,

France 3 Cinéma

#### Production

Companies

Why Not Productions

presents a Why

Not Productions,

France 3 Cinéma

co-production

With the participation

of Canal+, OCS,

France Télévisions

With the support of

Région Île-de-France

in partnership with

CNC, Soficinéma 11

#### Executive Producer

Martine Cassinelli

#### Cast

Bruno Podalydès

Michel

Sandrine Kiberlain

Rachelle

Agnès Jaoui

Laetitia

Vimala Pons

Mila

Denis Podalydès

Rémi

#### Michel Vuillermoz

Christophe

Jean-Noël Brouté

Damien

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

French theatrical title

Comme un avion

France, present day. At 50, graphic designer Michel is happily married to Rachelle, yet still harbours dreams of becoming an airmail pilot. Noticing its structural resemblance to an airmail plane, Michel buys a kayak, planning to spend a solo week exploring local waterways. His journey downstream has barely begun when he stumbles on an al fresco restaurant owned by widow Laetitia. Enjoying the setting and its various company, Michel is reluctant to move on. He sends indistinct photographs to Rachelle to disguise his lack of progress. Michel sleeps with Laetitia and spends a chaste night with young waitress Mila. He is repeatedly thwarted in his attempts to leave the restaurant. Laetitia rescues him when he passes out drunk in the kayak, and again when he's marooned in a supermarket car park. Finally departing, Michel deduces that Rachelle has been straying with his boss Rémi. As the week closes, Rachelle and Rémi meet Michel at journey's end.



# Home cinema



Figure in a landscape: Alan Ladd as the titular hero of *Shane*, a genteel drifter who also happens to be the deadliest draw in the history of the western genre

## TOP GUN

A fresh viewing of George Stevens's classic western shows *Shane* to be one of cinema's great gunslingers – and a match for Ethan Edwards

### SHANE

George Stevens; USA 1952; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B/2 Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 118 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: commentary, video interview with film scholar Neil Sinyard, Lux Radio Theatre adaptation, trailer, booklet

#### Reviewed by Graham Fuller

If *The Searchers*, seventh on *Sight & Sound*'s 2012 greatest films poll, is regarded by critics as the pre-eminent western, what then of *Shane*, which received three votes only? George Stevens's equally epochal classic, which grossed \$9 million in the US in 1953 compared with *The Searchers*' \$4.8 million and proved the most popular western of the decade, became instantly iconic, partly as a result of Stevens's mythifying it through the *mise en scène*, partly because of Alan Ladd's underrated portrayal of a frontier incarnation of Chaucer's "verray, parfit, gentil knight", who also happens to be the deadliest draw in the genre's history.

*The Searchers* is, of course, more morally

ambiguous than *Shane*. John Wayne's psychosexually tormented Ethan Edwards is haunting, especially in his reactions to the killings of the sister-in-law he secretly loved and her eldest daughter and to the madness of the women rescued from Indian captivity. Ford magisterially harnessed the rocky outcrops and dark spaces to evoke Ethan's turmoil. The film is tonally inconsistent, however – its grimness undercut by crude 'comic' scenes; the attack on the Comanche camp by the Texas Rangers and the cavalry, for instance, is poorly staged. Stevens permits no such jarring changes of mood or moments of crass humour in *Shane*, which builds gravely, inexorably and tragically towards the moment when Ladd's retired eponymous gunfighter is forced to renounce his newfound pacifism and kill again.

*Shane* was closely adapted from Jack Schaefer's 1949 novel, his first, by A.B. Guthrie Jr (author of *The Big Sky* and *The Way West*). Though the film's atmosphere and its loaded slurs against Rebs and Yankees suggest that it unfolds in the late 1860s or the 1870s, it is in fact set during Kentucky's Johnson County War of 1889-93, which was waged between homesteaders (frequently rustlers who went unpunished by the law) and

the cattle barons who sought to maintain the open range on which they'd made their fortunes. Stevens and Guthrie spare some sympathy for the cattleman Ryker (Emile Meyer), a wild-haired figure reminiscent of Moses or the abolitionist John Brown, who protests that he has rights to land he strove to clear of Indians and is now losing to the waves of 'sodbusters'. His greed and readiness to destroy the farms or kill their owners make him as anachronistic as his demonic hired gunman Wilson (Jack Palance) and Shane, as the latter acknowledges. They are falling gods.

*Shane*'s intricate psychological probing extends beyond Shane himself to each member of the Starrett family – Joe (Van Heflin), Marian (Jean Arthur) and their young son Joey (Brandon De Wilde) – whom he agrees to work for as a farmhand and tacitly protects after seeing them being menaced by Ryker and his henchmen. If it seems that Shane makes an unconscious decision to stay with the Starretts because he falls in love at first sight with Marian, as she does with him, he departs them having selflessly knocked out Joe to prevent him being gunned down by Wilson. Joe intended to confront Wilson to stop Ryker's persecution of the homesteaders; subconsciously he may have

nurtured a suicide wish after realising at the Independence Day dance that Marian and Shane love each other, albeit chastely. Joey's constant questioning about who is the stronger – Joe or Shane, the boy's idol and fantasy father-figure – has seemingly eroded Joe's masculine pride. Joey's prelapsarian obsession with Shane's power as a gunman is less interesting from a Freudian perspective than, as Marian fears, as an endangering influence – though it fascinates her, too, as his Mississippi courtesy charms her.

*Shane* surely influenced *The Searchers*. Each opens on a good man with a criminal past riding across a valley floor to a homestead. Marian's unspoken desire for Shane is mirrored by that of Martha (Dorothy Jordan) for Ethan, her husband's brother. Murders in each film lead to a ritualised hilltop burial. Each involves the training of a young acolyte. The existentialist hero in each must ride away once his job is done. Each is a concatenation of looks, especially *Shane*, which Stevens designed as a commentary on the experience of watching westerns. This is most explicit when Joey, the impressionable surrogate viewer, is framed in the saloon doorway watching Shane and Starrett's visceral fistfight with Ryker's men and witnessing Shane's duel with Wilson.

As the love object, Shane is also carefully framed by windows within and without the Starretts' house, for the benefit of both Joey and Marian. Such showcasing intensifies the moment when Joey, desperate for Shane to stay at the end of the film, calls to his departing figure, "Mother wants you, I know she does" – an appeal that furrows his brow as he gleans for the first time that love between adults is far from simple.

Victor Young's melancholy music – which helps position the story nostalgically, as the rite of passage the grown Joey will reflect on, in keeping with his retrospective narration (as Bob Starrett) in the novel – sustains the idea that *Shane* is a requiem for a noble savage at the closing of the frontier. Stevens's double use of the hymn 'Abide with Me' is ironic, since Shane is a Christian saviour – the angel of death – who sacrifices himself, perhaps literally, and may not abide. It is unclear if he is mortally wounded in the exchange of gunfire with Ryker's brother Morgan (John Dierkes) – an issue still debated by *Shane*-ites, who tend to argue wishfully that the wound is superficial and that Shane's slumping forward in the saddle as he rides back into the mountains (whence he came as an Olympian visitor) via the local graveyard is attributable to him riding uphill.

*Shane*'s Technicolor photography by Loyal Griggs made as much of the distant Grand Tetons as Winton C. Hoch made of Monument Valley in Ford's *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and *The Searchers*. Perhaps more: Stevens used the mountains as an implacable backdrop, whereas Ford used the sandstone buttes as a scenic backdrop promiscuously. (In terms of creating a garden out of the wilderness, the rough but crucially irrigated land on which men like Starrett, Fred Lewis and Ernie Wright have made their farms in *Shane* seems better for cultivating and raising stock on than the arid Edwards and Jorgensen



Jack Palance as demonic hired gunman Wilson

holdings in *The Searchers*.) Griggs's crepuscular lighting of ominous scenes at the Starretts' ranch – as when Shane and Wilson silently eye each other while Starrett and Ryker debate who has ownership rights to the range – and his use of chiaroscuro in the seconds leading up to Shane and Wilson's showdown contributed greatly to his winning the Oscar for best cinematography.

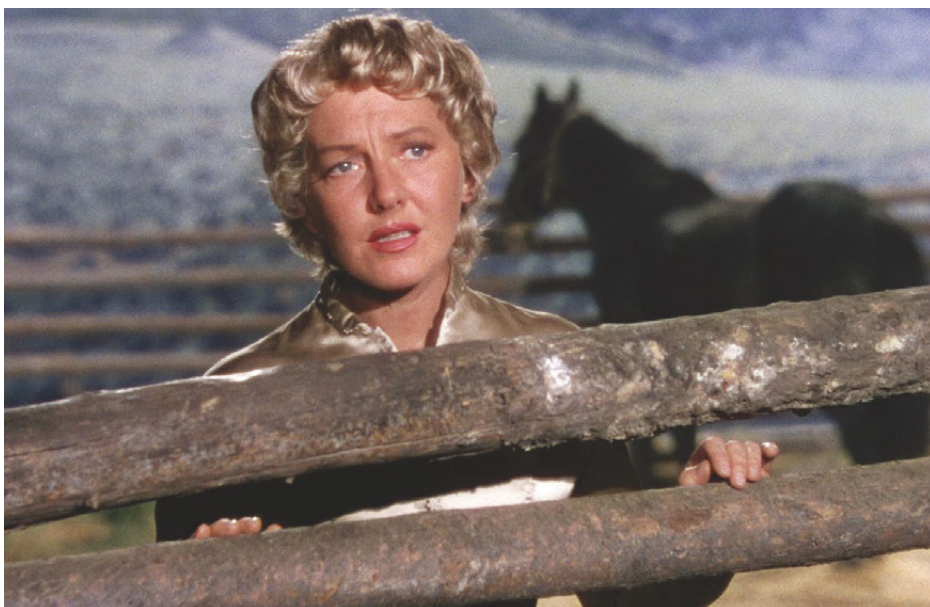
Although Stevens conceived *Shane* as an anti-violence western, specifically by showing what bullets do to the cocky Alabaman farmer 'Stonewall' Torrey (Elisha Cook Jr) when he draws on Wilson, the ferocious climactic duel between Shane and Wilson is appallingly thrilling, its impact partly attributable to howitzer sound effects. It takes Shane three seconds to draw, shoot Wilson and spin – as he had spun to draw when spooked by Joey on arriving at the Starretts' place – to shoot

*It builds gravely and inexorably towards the moment when Alan Ladd's retired gunfighter is forced to kill again*

Ryker; in the next 30 seconds, he laments his lethality, hears Joey shout a warning, and shoots Morgan. Sam Peckinpah, who regarded *Shane* "the best western ever made", drew on this ugly-beautiful *Götterdämmerung* in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), and hyperbolised it with slow motion and blood squibs in *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Peckinpah's documentary-like shots of vulnerable children standing around were also blueprinted by Stevens in *Shane*.

Griggs's colour photography gleams with crystalline perfection on the high-definition restoration of *Shane* released on Blu-ray by Eureka's Masters of Cinema collection. The snowcapped Tetons have acquired an extra glitter. Shane's blond hair and pale buckskins – which link him to Daniel Boone, Hawkeye and Gary Cooper in *The Westerner* (1940) – take on a spectral quality against the darkening sky and in the murk of the saloon. His cat-like grace and habit of leaning with deceptive casualness – against the side of the Starretts' cabin and the saloon bar – when facing Ryker seems more emphatic now.

As well as the one-disc Blu-ray edition, Eureka has issued a two-disc set, limited to 2,000 copies, which includes the 1.37:1 Academy ratio version intended by Stevens – the version that Paramount blew up to 1.66:1 for the 1953 theatrical release – and also an alternate 1.66:1 framing supervised by George Stevens Jr, whose commentary with British associate producer Ivan Moffat has been recycled from an earlier release. Completists unable to get their hands on the limited edition can console themselves with the thought that the Academy version is the only one they should be looking at anyway. The booklet provides Penelope Houston's *Sight & Sound* essay on *Shane*, which makes a fitting tribute to her in the wake of her recent death; a sometimes baffling interview revealing Stevens's concern for the "Jovian" and "supernatural"; and Moffat's treatment for an unfilmed prologue that would have turned most of *Shane* into an extended flashback. 📺



Jean Arthur as Marian Starrett, object of Shane's unspoken love



# New releases

## ABILENE TOWN

Edwin L. Marin; USA 1946; Panamint/Region A, B & C Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 89 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: trailer for 'Inferno' (1953), booklet

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Randolph Scott probably starred in more westerns than any other Hollywood A-lister except John Wayne. Almost invariably his character was staunch and morally upright – sometimes grim, as in the seven classic low-budgeters he made with Budd Boetticher, sometimes leavened with a touch of humour. (In *Blazing Saddles*, his name is reverently chanted like that of a deity.) It took Sam Peckinpah, in Scott's final movie *Ride the High Country* (aka *Guns in the Afternoon*, 1962), to bring out the sly duplicity behind all that integrity.

Scottian integrity is to the fore in *Abilene Town*, a routine ranchers-vs-settlers western directed by reliable studio workhorse Edwin L. Marin (*Johnny Angel*, *Canadian Pacific*). Still, the film has a few quirky elements that pull it out of the rut. *Abilene*, in this telling, is a town split down the middle: on one side of the main street are respectable stores, hairdressers and the like; on the other, rowdy saloons given over to gambling, boozing and leggy chorus girls, with Scott's town sheriff riding shotgun down the middle. (Given the film's date, it could almost be read as an allegory for West and East Berlin.)

As in so many westerns, there's the good girl (Rhonda Fleming) and the bad girl (Ann Dvorak); here, unexpectedly, the sheriff winds up with the bad girl. There's also a running gag, rather overworked, about the clash between Scott's law-upholding character and the county sheriff (Edgar Buchanan), who's fat, lazy, corrupt and concerned only to stay well clear of trouble.

The modest budget occasionally shows through: though *Abilene* was famously the railroad at the end of the Chisholm Trail, the only train that features is an offscreen sound effect.

**Disc:** The 2K HD scan is clean, if a little sombre; despite the boast of 'LPCM lossless audio', the sound turns audibly gritty at the start and end of reels.

## BLIND CHANCE

Krzysztof Kieslowski; Poland 1981; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 123 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: interviews with Tadeusz Sobolewski and Agnieszka Holland, nine sections of the film censored in 1987, essay by critic Dennis Lim

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Only Kieslowski's third fiction feature, finished just as martial law was clamped on Poland in 1981 and shelved by the authorities for six years, this quantum meditation pioneered the idea, coopted like crazy since, of a film story branching out via happenstance and offering multiple narratives, each equally possible and none of them 'true'.

The young Boguslaw Linda stars as Witek, a medical student on leave, running to catch a train to Warsaw – which he boards, then misses and then misses again. Kieslowski's concerns are not merely psychological or even metaphysical – Witek's destinies are yoked inevitably to the climate of social existence in communist Poland during the regime's final decade. First, on the train, Witek falls in with an avuncular Party functionary and ends up a willing agent of the system, inadvertently getting his own girlfriend

arrested. Next, his missing the train leads his path to cross with that of radical unionists and finds him embroiled with anti-Party activism. Finally, missing the train reunites him with a med-school lover; a content family life and medical career follow, during which Witek is determined to remain neutral in his dangerously either/or landscape, only in the end for happenstance to kill him (rather spectacularly) anyway.

Kieslowski was already attempting to leave what he saw as the mundanities of sociopolitical conflict behind, in favour of the more cosmic-moral mysteries he reached for in *No End*, *The Decalogue*, *The Double Life of Veronique* and the *Three Colours* trilogy. But the structure of *Blind Chance* is insistently a defiant critique of the communist era. It was made in the wake of the successful mass strikes of 1980 (explicitly referenced in the film) and the creation of Solidarity – but Witek's own brand of crisis soon befell the film: first script-approved, then banned, then censored. Witek is not simply a tool of fate, but a model of the citizen allergic to ideology, who cannot survive or find happiness under totalitarianism no matter what side he chooses. The system itself creates the inevitability of any fork in the road leading to disaster, in a society plagued by moral compromise.

Witek's life is a virtual index of recent Polish history (the opening first-person memory montage includes an off-kilter shot of a corpse-bloodied hospital corridor, seen from between a dying woman's legs – Witek's birth, right during the violent 1956 strike suppressions in Poznan), keeping the political pressure claustrophobically close. At the same time this movie is where Kieslowski began to move away from his gritty-realism style and towards the soaringly evocative Romantic palette he would make his own – abetted here not by his famous compatriots Slawomir Idziak (DP) and Zbigniew Preisner (music) but achieving the same unmistakably transcendent flavour all the same.

If the schematic nature of Kieslowski's beautiful but stone-heavy symbolism can put you off – just look at those jugglers – then attend to the sense of melancholy grandeur, suggesting a spiritualism that's never articulated and an auroral feeling about the arc of life that's nearly Blakean.

**Disc:** A typically spotless Criterion spiff-up, with typically erudite essay by Dennis Lim, though



Vested interests: *Devil in a Blue Dress*

the jewel here is the suite of scenes censored in 1987, now restored but highlighted individually, giving us a literal glimpse into late communism's shallow brainpan. One scene (Witek's beating by police in the second story) is still lost, while a song sung at a gathering by Solidarity leader Jacek Kaczmarek is literally replaced on the soundtrack by a propaganda ballad.

## THE CAPTIVE HEART

Basil Dearden; UK 1946; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 104 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: introduction by film historian Charles Barr

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Released in April 1946, this Ealing production was the first WWII prisoner-of-war drama to hit the screen, its avowed purpose to pay tribute to the men captured during the fall of Dunkirk who'd spent years behind barbed wire in Germany. In the aftermath of VE Day, their experiences might have been overlooked, but the opening narration proclaims their "unbroken spirit" as "the symbol of a moral victory for which no bell has pealed". Of course, the British POW flick subsequently became the stuff of celluloid and televisual cliché, but here the filmmakers were working from the ground up – co-writer Guy Morgan had in fact served time in the Marlag & Milag camp where the film was shot – organising the narrative around an ensemble ethos that was to become Ealing's trademark.

From doughty East End builder Jack Warner to his Welsh mate Mervyn Johns, stoic Scottish private Gordon Jackson and their posh English commander Basil Radford, the proceedings show common purpose spanning class and national boundaries as the focus shifts back and forth from camp confines to home front.

The key storyline, though, brings a dash of melodramatic fervour to all this low-key observation, as fugitive Czech Michael Redgrave's ruse of posing as a dead British captain to avoid a Nazi death sentence involves him writing to the latter's estranged wife (Rachel Kempson, the real-life Mrs Redgrave). Indeed, among the film's cheery character detail and tacit heroism the real frisson comes through their correspondence, which constructs a shared vision of cricket on the village green and apple trees in blossom. Easy from a modern standpoint to see such bucolic imagery as an essentially white middle-class fantasy, yet the very idea of a shared sense of nationhood, of values worth defending through years of suffering, still retains the power to move.

**Disc:** The new digital restoration has come up well, showing Douglas Slocombe's camerawork at its best. Interestingly, Charles Barr's introduction offers an apology for undervaluing Basil Dearden in the past (though he warned that his keen reappraisal of the film includes spoilers).

## DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS

Carl Franklin; USA 1995; Twilight Time/Region-free Blu-ray; 101 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: isolated score track, audio commentary by writer/director Carl Franklin, Don Cheadle screen test, original theatrical trailer

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

*Devil in a Blue Dress*, part of a windfall of American crime pictures that appeared in the late 1980s and 1990s and were



## MURDER, HE WROTE

T.S. Eliot's dark and menacing telling of the assassination of Thomas Becket deserves a revisit – and perhaps even a horror remake

### MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

George Hoellering; UK 1952; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 114 minutes; Features: original theatrical version (114 minutes), alternative festival cut (136 minutes), 'Message from Canterbury' (1944), 'Shapes and Forms' (1950), 'Glasgow Orpheus Choir' (1951), booklet with essays by Andrew Hoellering and András Szekfű

#### Reviewed by Kevin Jackson

The ghost of T.S. Eliot – never all that thoroughly exorcised, despite the most strenuous efforts of his detractors – is flitting among us again, harder than ever to ignore. Faber & Faber, still only part way through the massive project of printing all of Eliot's letters, has just published the first definitive edition of his complete poems; and now here is *Murder in the Cathedral*, the all but forgotten 1952 film of Eliot's increasingly neglected 1935 play about the martyrdom of St Thomas. In the past few decades, Eliot's plays, which once packed out West End theatres and were dutifully set as A-level texts, have been relegated to the cultural attic next to the verse dramas of Christopher Fry and Charles Williams. It's a good time to blow off the dust and see what's there.

George Hoellering's film of *Murder* was a labour of enthusiasm, possibly even of love. The Austrian-born director overcame Eliot's considerable misgivings about bringing the piece to the screen, and even persuaded him to speak the part of St Thomas's Fourth Tempter, who in the film appears only as a spectral voice. This touch is quite spooky, and is one of the film's happier inventions, since in other scenes Hoellering usually plays down or glosses over the weird (even by Eliot's standards) morbidity of the verses: "I have smelt/ Corruption in the dish, incense in the latrine, the/ sewer in the incense, the smell of sweet soap in/ the woodpath, a hellish sweet scent in the woodpath/ while the ground heaved..."

Possibly the biggest surprise of revisiting *Murder* is that parts of it are as ghoulish as anything in English drama since Webster, which is to say that it might well have been shot like a horror movie, all shadows and menace. This is not Hoellering's way; far from it.

The truism about period films coming to seem more like the times in which they were made than the times in which they were set is often borne out here. Hoellering's vision of the 12th century looks and sounds more like Austerity Britain (Mk 1) than the actual Middle Ages. The interiors of the cathedral are all too obviously cheap confections of wood and plaster; the accents are all officer class, so much so that the chorus of impoverished Canterbury women sounds like the senior common room at Girton; and the minimal set-dressing suggests



Poetry in motion: George Hoellering's *Murder in the Cathedral*

less a calculated aesthetic of sparseness than a pinched budget. Nor is there more than a feeble attempt in the direction of realism. For anyone used to the dung and oomska of medieval films by more recent directors – Pasolini, Terry Gilliam – this is an almost ludicrously well-scrubbed, dry and tidy little world. Eliot's verses harp on the piercing December cold and damp, but there is not a frosted breath or comfortless shudder in the whole film.

With most other texts, this would be a serious liability. But since *Murder* is in many regards more like a pageant or even a rite than a conventional play, none of this jars too much. Nor does the casting of a non-actor, Father John Groser, in the central role of Thomas Becket seem altogether inappropriate. He gives a crisp, headmasterly reading of his lines, and though he can't manage anything in the way of depth or nuance, he has dignitas by the bucketload.

There are times when this austere drama of temptation itself offers the viewer a different temptation: to seek comparisons with another spiritually inclined director much given to the use of non-actors and sparse means: Bresson. This is not to say that Hoellering is a figure comparable to Bresson; only that his self-effacing technique is quite well suited to the hieratic aspects of Eliot's play. Perhaps the time is ripe for a remake by a

*Possibly the biggest surprise of revisiting 'Murder' is that parts of it are as ghoulish as anything in English drama since Webster*

horror director, one who might show us its darker side – its skull beneath the skin. Ben Wheatley?

Among the extras are three short films also directed by Hoellering. *Glasgow Orpheus Choir* (1951, 13 minutes) shows Sir Hugh Robertson – who was about to retire from the ensemble he had founded – conducting male and female singers performing a selection of traditional Scottish songs. *Shapes and Forms* (1950, 21 minutes) is a spinoff from the ICA's 1948 show *40,000 Years of Modern Art*, which brought masks, statues and carvings from ethnological collections together with famous examples of modern art – Brancusi, Modigliani, Ernst, Picasso, Moore; in place of commentary, there is a musical accompaniment (by the Hungarian composer Laszlo Lajtha, whose over-busy score for *Murder* is, alas, one of its weaker points) and dramatic shifts in lighting. It may have been challenging stuff in its day but now it seems at best pleasant, at worst old-hat.

Far and away the best of the trio is *Message from Canterbury* (filmed from 1942 onwards but only released in 1944). The film is framed by images of agricultural Kent during wartime and the bombsites of Canterbury; these are very much in the spirit of Humphrey Jennings, and some of the shots would not seem out of place in *Listen to Britain* (1942). At its heart is an exceptional sermon preached by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, who begins with a history of the cathedral itself and ends with an appeal for a new Britain of universal free education, decent housing, careful stewardship of the environment and freedom of speech: in short, for the better world adumbrated at the end of Jennings's *A Diary for Timothy* (1945). Hear it and weep. 📺



## TREMORS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

A half-century of American abstract filmmaking reveals a medium in a state of constant creative metamorphosis

### MASTERWORKS OF AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE EXPERIMENTAL FILM, 1920-1970

Various 1920-70; Flicker Alley/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD; 418 minutes; Features: 'Sappho and Jerry, Parts 1-3' (Bruce Posner, 1977-78), 'Seasons...' (Phil Solomon, Stan Brakhage, 2002), 'Ch'an' (Francis Lee, 1983) with music by Christopher Atwood, booklet

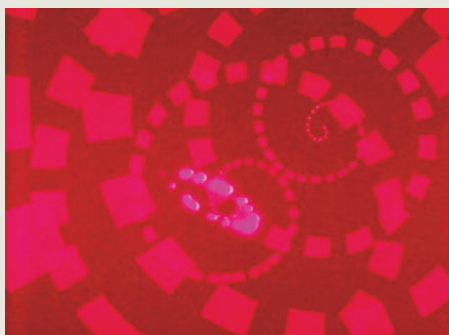
**Reviewed by Jordan Cronk**

Wisely, Flicker Alley doesn't attempt to annotate the half-century's worth of American avant-garde experimental film included on its new Blu-ray/DVD box-set so much as outline a rough trajectory of noteworthy accomplishments in interdisciplinary visual art over its most evolutionary span. Curated by filmmaker and preservationist Bruce Posner, this four-disc, region-free collection resurrects 37 works (many of them restored and new to digital) and allows them to navigate a course through the past rather than imposing an historical lineage through which to view their attributes.

Which is to say that the films included cover not only a wide-ranging period but also a variety of practices best understood as products of a medium in continual metamorphosis, whose practitioners were consistently attempting to reconcile material means with ever more ambitious conceptual interests. The earliest film in the set, *Manhatta* (1921), by Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, embodies one of the most frequent of these approaches: an observational portrait of an urban locale – in this case, New York City. It exemplifies the nascent 'city symphony' movement that would take hold in various cinematic sectors throughout the 1920s, culminating with Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* in 1929.

It's a style that continues to the present day, and it's a method seen across this set, from Robert Florey's self-explanatory *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929) to Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931), Rudy Burckhardt's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1940) and, finally and most impressively, Francis Thompson's *N.Y., N.Y.* (1958), a literally kaleidoscopic vision of Manhattan which outfits the camera lens with mirrors and various reflective surfaces to produce a colour-coated prism of spiralling architecture and refracted light sources.

Besides being set in New York, these films also share a quasi-documentary mode of production and perspective. Across the country in Los Angeles, meanwhile, filmmakers were grafting abstract narratives on to evocative visual frameworks, producing ghostly simulacra of concurrent Hollywood melodramas. Included here are two of the best: Robert Florey and



Mary Ellen Bute and Ted Nemeth's *Abstronic*

Slavko Vorkapich's *The Life and Death of 9413 – A Hollywood Extra* (1927) and Maya Deren and Alexandr Hackenschmied's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). The former, an industry parable set in a deserted, eerily nocturnal Los Angeles, is defined by resourceful effects and noir-tinged cinematography (courtesy of a pre-*Citizen Kane* Gregg Toland); the latter, a surrealist psychodrama starring the filmmakers as a couple caught in a web of domestic unease and shifting identities, all but redefined cinema's capacity for suggestive and imagistic storytelling through its radically intuitive editing strategies and inscrutably gothic imagery.

As technology advanced through the decades, narrative often took a back seat to pure aesthetic spectacle. Mary Ellen Bute described this new medium of expression as the 'Absolute Film' – an appropriate designation for *Tarantella* (1940), which she directed with Ted Nemeth (with additional animation by Norman McLaren) and whose playful geometric abstractions helped to


*As technology advanced through the decades, narrative often took a back seat to pure aesthetic spectacle*

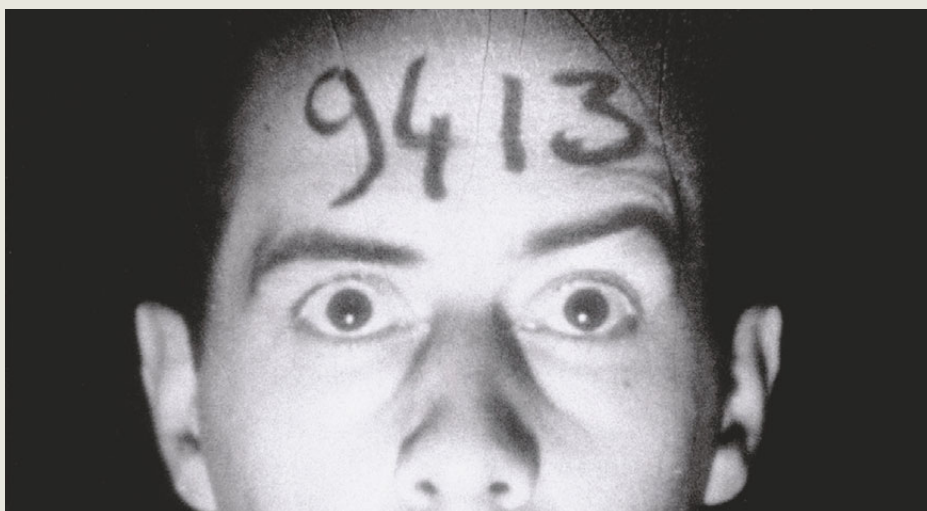
further the notion of 'visual music' – or as Bute and Nemeth deemed it, the 'Seeing Sound film'.

It's a definition that can also be used to describe *Abstronic* (1952), another of the duo's sensory animations, as well as such disparate works as Ian Hugo's intoxicating aquatic revelry *Bells of Atlantis* (1953), Jim Davis's shapeshifting *Evolution* (1954), Hy Hirsh's sculptural motion study *Gyromorphosis* (1954) and Lawrence Janiak's *DL2* (1970), a piece that applied colour gels to 'shocked' strips of unprocessed film.

The chronology becomes more curious at the turn of the 1960s – a nearly ten-year gap is unaccounted for between 1958 and Hilary Harris's *9 Variations on a Dance Theme*, from 1967. The early 1960s represented the apex of the underground film movement in America, an era that this set doesn't attempt to address. Thus, while the strikingly beautiful early Kenneth Anger film *Eaux d'artifice* (1953) is included, it's not exactly representative of the more provocative persona he would soon cultivate; meanwhile Jonas Mekas, founder of the flagship New American Cinema Group, is left to represent the New York contingent with an excerpt from *Walden* (1969), a scintillating audiovisual diary of late-60s Manhattan.


So while Jack Smith, Ron Rice, Andy Warhol and Gregory Markopoulos are conspicuous by their absence, the less outwardly challenging but nonetheless progressive *Castro Street* (*The Coming of Consciousness*), by San Francisco's Bruce Baillie (1966), and *The Film That Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter* (1968), a hybrid live-action/sketch animation by New England's Owen Land, evidence the happenings occurring elsewhere in the US during this most tumultuous of cultural moments.

Ultimately, that's the greatest virtue of this set – it allows the viewer to chart America's tremors and transformations through its most modern of artistic practices, proposing these frequently staggering films less as time capsules than historical rejoinders. 



Head games: Robert Florey and Slavko Vorkapich's *The Life and Death of 9413 – A Hollywood Extra*

# New releases

 saddled with the unfortunate designation 'neo-noir', is an outlier for a number of reasons, the most obvious being the fact that it is set in an African-American milieu: post-war Los Angeles, among Southern blacks blown west in the Great Migration.

Thankfully, director Carl Franklin – fresh off the cult success of genre piece *One False Move* (1992) – grounds his film's sociohistorical context with an acute feel for atmospherics and contemporary mores, attentive to the particular caution that must be taken by a black man playing private dick in LAPD territory. This is but one cause for discretion in a film where secrets abound, often played out at the level of a whisper, as when we catch morally compromised amateur investigator Ezekiel 'Easy' Rawlins in an early-morning assignation with his friend's old lady while that friend lies in the next room in a deep, whisky-induced coma.

Rawlins, portrayed by Denzel Washington, is the creation of crime writer Walter Mosley, and the anchor of an ongoing cycle of PI adventures by the author. Franklin sometimes avails himself of voiceover short cuts in order to hit all of Mosley's plot twists, but arriving at the individual scenes of this floating crap game he settles in to linger on the constant process of sizing up and cutting down, generous to his performers but never overindulgent. Jennifer Beals, as a 'passing' light-skinned Creole woman, never seems to find a handle on the title role, but Washington is at his most sanguine and charismatic, and Don Cheadle gets a star-making supporting bit as Easy's pistol-packing buddy from back home in Houston, twinkling with childish malice every time he flashes his gold incisors ("If you ain't want him killed, then why'd you leave him with me?").

**Disc:** Extras include an isolated track for Elmer Bernstein's spare, insinuating score, and a transfer tune-up servicing the swagger-sway Steadicam sequence shots by the film's DP Tak Fujimoto – a regular collaborator of Jonathan Demme, credited here as an executive producer. As with *Miami Blues* (1990), another crime-fic adaptation with contributions from Demme and Fujimoto, one is haunted by the prospect of the sequels that might have been.

## THE FALLEN IDOL

Carol Reed; UK 1948; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 95 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: interviews with star Bobby Henrey, assistant director Guy Hamilton, film historian Charles Drazin and filmmaker Richard Ayoade, locations guide by Richard Dacre, restoration comparison

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Inside a two-year period, Carol Reed made *Odd Man Out*, this truly marvellous Graham Greene-scripted chamber drama and *The Third Man*. Reed wasn't just on a roll, he was on fire. Somehow though, *The Fallen Idol* has always been the Cinderella title among this esteemed trio, perhaps lacking the pulse-quickenning spectacle or thrilling baroque visuals of the other two.

However, the current carefully restored release makes a strong case that this story of dangerously unpredictable consequences when a diplomat's innocent young son eavesdrops – uncomprehendingly – on a



Crazy stupid love: *The Honeymoon Killers*

butler's illicit affair remains the most perfect jewel in Reed's entire filmography.

The director and Greene worked together to refashion the latter's short story 'The Basement Room' into a more complex scenario. Its palpable, anything-might-happen tension derives from the fact that Bobby Henrey's junior protagonist ultimately holds sway over the fate of errant yet immensely sympathetic Ralph Richardson, but does so with the limited attention span, mood swings and partial comprehension of the adult world befitting any eight-year-old boy. Key to the film's holding power is the astute way that Reed's direction establishes an effective double perspective, in which a child's-eye camera placement makes the Belgravia embassy a daunting, mysterious, grown-up environment, while elsewhere micro-detailed attention to performance shows the subtlety with which Richardson portrays an ordinary man buckling under the weight of marital and class hierarchies.

Initially it seems such a small story, yet its significance grows as we're immersed in it, contemplating a child's first corrosive inkling of evil in the world and, indeed, a decent man's growing realisation of the thin tissue of circumstance separating happiness from damnation. Georges Périnal's majestic black-and-white camerawork brings out the unsettling polarities of the setting, from serenely empty sunlit London squares to the sinister glint of rain-slicked backstreet mews under lamplight. Timeless and intoxicating, this newly buffed-up masterpiece positively demands your attention.

**Disc:** The restoration comparison shows the excellent work done to transform rather faded original elements. A solid set of contextualising interviews add value, though you'd imagine this deserved its own standalone documentary.

## THE HONEYMOON KILLERS

Leonard Kastle; USA 1969; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 108 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'Love Letters' (video piece by Robert Fischer), 'Folie à Deux' and 'Body Shaming' (Todd Robinson explores the film and the true story of the Lonely Hearts Killers), 'Beyond Morality' (Fabrice du Welz discusses the film), booklet with essay by Johnny Mains

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Like creeping water damage running down a tract-house wall, Leonard Kastle's famous cultified New Wave indie still shines with the rundown nimbus of post-war suburban despair, decked out with kitchen fluorescents, worn rugs and polyester prints. It was Kastle's only effort,

once touted by Truffaut as his favourite American film, and it sneaked under the radar as one of the integral grainy black-and-white 60s visions of America After the Fall, alongside *Carnival of Souls*, *Seconds* and *Night of the Living Dead*.

Based on the trial transcripts of the infamous 1949 'Lonely Hearts Club' murder case, the tale recounts, in one cramped, featureless room after another, the exploits of porcine ex-nurse Martha Beck (the formidable Shirley Stoler) and seedy Spanish conman Raymond Fernandez (Tony Lo Bianco, in one of his earliest roles and possibly peaking), who were eventually executed in Sing Sing for murder after spending years stealing from the lonely women Fernandez met via a correspondence club. With the pugnaciously jealous Beck posing as his sister, Fernandez would agree to marry each spinster or widow, and then make off with their cash. Things got out of hand, of course, and corpses began piling up.

Kastle, who agreed to direct his own script once a young, artsy-fartsy Martin Scorsese was kicked off the project after a week's worth of shooting, invests his movie with catastrophic bitterness. But like the unamused twin of John Waters, Kastle loves the cheap, familiar strangeness of the low-rent milieu (indeed, Stoler was the scary real woman Divine could never quite be), and the film's tone is scrupulously arch, evoking a canned B-movieness that's organic but also helplessly ironic. Even the abrupt, melodramatic blasts of Mahler sound as though they're coming from an offscreen console radio. Sociopathy is vividly implied; Lo Bianco's Ray croons his lines like Ricardo Montalban in a studio romance, clearly inhabiting a different movie in his head. The victims, on the other hand, are a slew of corn-fed wonders (especially Mary Jane Higby and Kip McArdle), as indelibly convincing as if they'd stepped out of a Maysles documentary of the era.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray transfer is eye-stingingly stark, enough to have Oliver Wood's cinematography for once evoke comparisons with the Bronx interiors of Scorsese's fastidious *Raging Bull* a decade later. The film is also released in the US by Criterion, with extras including interviews with Kastle, Lo Bianco and others; in his interview, shot in 2003, Kastle seems warm and happy in his dotage, but his one and only film is dazzlingly cold-blooded.

## KING OF THE HILL

Steven Soderbergh; USA 1993; Fabulous Films/Region 2 DVD; 99 minutes; Certificate 12; 2.35:1

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Soderbergh's *Kafka* was slated for impenetrability, yet ironically his follow-up, this coming-of-age drama of a hardscrabble St Louis boyhood in the Depression, received flak for its feelgood aspects. But under the golden-hued schoolyard scams adapted from A.E. Hotchner's tough little memoir (via a Soderbergh-penned script) lies a thoughtful, spiky layer of poor-boy humiliations and spiralling losses, reducing the world of resourceful 12-year-old protagonist Aaron to a notch above the Hooverville shantytown nearby. Both sweet and sour, unlike near contemporaries *Stand by Me* and *This Boy's Life*, the film takes a boy's-eye-view of the fallible, sweat-beaded adults who surround Aaron. Jeroen Krabbé's





# Television

## BETTER CALL SAUL

USA 2015; BBC/Simply Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 486 minutes; 16:9. Features: 'Better Call Saul: Day One'; 'Creating the First Season' cast and crew commentaries, gag reel, music video (Blu-ray additional features: deleted scenes, 'In Conversation: Bob Odenkirk & Michael McKean'; 'Good Cop, Bad Cop: Becoming Mike'; 'Kettle Kommentary with Craig & Betsy Kettleman'; 'Jimmy in the Courtroom'; 'Jimmy Kaleidoscope'; cast and crew table read on 'Uno'; 'In the Studio with Junior Brown')

### Reviewed by Robert Hanks

At some point since the millennium – I should have been paying closer attention to when – awkwardness seems to have become a, if not *the*, dominant mood of television fiction: where once television aimed to make the viewer laugh or cry or occasionally hide behind the sofa, now it wants to embarrass you, to induce sweaty palms, a prickling scalp and an urge to fiddle with your mobile phone (and this, just at the moment in history when phones started being really fun to fiddle with).

*Better Call Saul* is a prime example. Right at the start of the first episode, Jimmy McGill – he has not yet become Saul Goodman, Walter White's lawyer/fixer in *Breaking Bad* – is rehearsing a defence speech in the courtroom toilets, pacing and fidgeting in front of the urinals. So much sweat and anxiety; and so it goes on, as Jimmy blusters, slimes and half-lies his way through courtroom speeches and encounters with sinister parking attendants, potential clients, swanky lawyers and the skater boys who first try to scam him and whom he then recruits to work a scam of his own... Watching so much self-destructiveness and ineffectual low cunning is the very opposite of cathartic; I nearly didn't make it through the first episode.

But in the second episode, it takes off – though metaphors of flight don't really work when Jimmy is so much a victim of gravity, dragged down by the weight of his debts, his sense of his own weakness, his yearning for the short cut and the quick fix, and his conman past in Cicero, Illinois (that his hometown takes its name from the greatest courtroom orator of classical times is not, I'm guessing, an accidental irony). So it snowballs, maybe. It moves faster and feels funnier. The skater-boy scam turns into a near-fatal confrontation with a Hispanic drug-dealer, which leads into a new set of complications. But as the plots thicken and multiply, Jimmy/Saul shows new sides to his character: at the moment when he could walk away and leave his skater boys to take the brunt of the drug-dealer's wrath, he turns and risks his neck to argue for their lives, and pulls it off.

It's this sense of character, of its tenacity and malleability, that makes the show particularly gripping, and supplies the uneasy laughs. The writers resist the temptation to give us an explanation – the unhappy childhood, the decisive event – that would explain Jimmy/Saul's criminal weakness; venality is, a series of flashbacks implies, written all the way through him, like Brighton rock. The trajectory of his life is easily discernible, and surely would be even if this weren't a prequel, even if we didn't have the *film noir* prologue in the present day, with him working in a fast-food joint and



**Better Call Saul** The writers resist the temptation to give us an explanation for Jimmy/Saul's criminal weakness; venality is written all the way through him

waiting for a surprise from the past (cf Viggo Mortensen in *A History of Violence*). Still, in any given crisis Jimmy's response is entirely unpredictable. He might squirm and collapse, overcome by stupidity and a base instinct for self-preservation; or he might suddenly suffer a rush of courage, decency, intelligence. Bob Odenkirk manages these reversals impressively – the show relies more heavily than is strictly healthy on his sheer hard work. Another season's in the pipeline. Better call Bob.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray offers the kind of crisp, in-your-face picture and sound you expect from contemporary high-budget TV.

### HOLDING ON

Adrian Shergold; UK 1997; BBC/Simply Entertainment/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 440 minutes; 1.33:1

### Reviewed by Robert Hanks

I had forgotten, until watching it on DVD, how much fuss this six-part drama caused when it was first broadcast – in the autumn of 1997, soon enough after Diana and Dodi were killed for a line about Prince William to be edited out on grounds of taste. Television reviewers, if not the general public, found it hard to talk about anything else for weeks, it seemed; and it's not hard to see why: apart from the obvious edginess – the sex, coke-snorting, nipple piercings and post-watershed language seem remarkably contemporary – it's a very clever and stylish bit of work.


The social panorama, the fiction of the way we live now, is hardly a new form, but it's one that English writers have struggled with in

recent years: interesting that the most openly acknowledged debt here is to Robert Altman – the climax of the first episode takes place in front of a cinema where *Short Cuts* is playing. Tony Marchant's script, with its interlocking storylines, does better than most at pulling in all sorts and conditions: a murdered woman, her distraught sister, the boss who sexually harassed her, the schizophrenic man who killed her, the mother who had been begging psychiatric services for help, the cab driver who witnessed the murder, his faithless wife. Another strand – or is it? – brings in a zealous tax inspector, his nurse wife, his admiring assistant, the dodgy businessman he's pursuing; then there's the middle-aged businesswoman and her younger security-guard lover, whose story overlaps with the guy on the council estate who wants to quit being a chef to be a DJ. And his life in the kitchens brings him into the orbit of Gary Rickey, prole restaurant critic, whose disdainful prose makes him the terror of the trade and who sneaks off to the bogs at high-end eateries to vomit up the delicacies and scarf cheese-and-onion crisps, and delivers a commentary on the action straight to camera.

The casting is excellent: Phil Daniels is particularly enjoyable as Gary, but there is strong support from a youngish David Morrissey, Lesley Manville, Sam Kidd and Treva Etienne. It is all too self-conscious for its own good, but it still has a breadth and density that were pretty much unprecedented on British television at the time.

**Disc:** Clean transfer from good original. No extras.

# New releases

 blustering father is a particular standout, as is Spalding Gray's dissolute neighbour, his charm thinned by drink and self-delusion.

Soderbergh later expressed his dissatisfaction with the film's good looks ("I wish it had been more Rossellini and less me"). But DP Elliot Davis's handsome visuals give a neatly disconcerting air to harsh realities such as Aaron's gut-gouging pauper's dinner, composed only of magazine pictures of food. It's a part of the stealthy visual contraction of his world that Soderbergh uses to great effect, underlining both the shame and the shrinkage that poverty inflicts.

**Disc:** Handsome for a DVD, the transfer emphasises the film's Norman Rockwell palette (soft yellows and those barn-reds). A barebones release, however, with none of the contextualising extras found on the Criterion Blu-ray.

## THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVES DOWN THE LANE

Nicolas Gessner; Canada/France 1976; Signal One Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 92 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: commentary (Nathaniel Thompson, Tim Greer), trailer

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Released towards the end of 1976, a professional *annus mirabilis* for its star Jodie Foster (also the year of *Bugsy Malone* and *Taxi Driver*), this unsettling French-Canadian suspense thriller casts her as 13-year-old Rynn Jacobs, ostensibly living with her father in a small Quebec town – though she constantly tells increasingly suspicious visitors that he's extremely busy and not to be disturbed under any circumstances.

That's 'suspicious' in two senses of the term, particularly where her landlady's son Frank Hallet is concerned. Played by a shifty-looking Martin Sheen as close kin to *Badlands*' Kit Carruthers (and with, for British viewers, a somewhat disconcerting resemblance to Jonathan Ross), he's someone whose intentions towards Rynn could hardly be clearer – and are far from protective. But this is no crude girl-in-peril stalk-and-slasher in which the female lead is a passive victim – Rynn draws first blood, and when she confides her secret to her slightly older but still teenage friend Mario (Scott Jacoby), it leads to a chillingly casual exchange. ("Don't bodies decompose?" "You can put stuff on them. I looked it up in the library").

In stark contrast to Foster's other films that year, everything here is calculatedly small-scale, with most of the action taking place on the ground floor of Rynn's house (Laird Koenig's source novel has also been adapted for the stage, and it's easy enough to imagine how that might have worked).

Barring the occasional establishing shot and cutaway (and, in the case of a nude scene that would almost certainly be unfilmable in today's post-Yewtree environment, an obvious body double), Foster is in almost every frame, and there's at least as much tension between Rynn's youth and her preternatural self-confidence ('precocious' scarcely does her justice) as there is between Rynn and everyone else. Mario's fondness for stage illusions, costumes, make-up and maintaining a self-consciously eccentric 'presence' has nothing on Rynn's inscrutable stillness. The narrative ingredients suggest



*The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane*

melodramatic blood and thunder (there's even a rattling horror-film trap door) but Foster makes it all seem bizarrely plausible.

**Disc:** A promising debut for a new British label, offering an excellent high-definition transfer of the original, a slightly longer cut (*Monthly Film Bulletin* suggests it was shown in British cinemas but the US version was trimmed for an implausible-seeming PG rating) and a chatty, well-researched commentary by Nathaniel Thompson (Mondo Digital) and Tim Greer (DVD Delirium).

## ON THE BEACH

Stanley Kramer; USA 1959; Signal One Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 134 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.66:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: commentary, interview, on-set footage, image galleries, trailer

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Two decades before *Mad Max* first hit the road, Stanley Kramer directed what was effectively the first Australian post-apocalypse film (at least in setting), although the tone is much closer to the inexorably despairing likes of its near contemporary *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961). Both films revolve around the Earth's slow-motion descent into the abyss, whether brought about by the sun or, in this case, the imminent arrival of a presumed-lethal cloud of fallout from a nuclear war that is already thought to have devastated the entire northern hemisphere.

The nuclear paranoia (overt or allegorical) characteristic of much mid-1950s American cinema has here given way to a resigned fatalism ("How can the members be expected to get through 400 bottles of port in five months' time?"), although passions understandably rise when the notion presents itself of deliberately killing babies instead of letting them outlive their parents. There's a pointedly *fin de siècle* (or *fin d'humanité*) feel to the dinner dances and keeping-up-appearances socialising; later, sports such as fishing (in irradiated seas) and car racing are conducted without the slightest concern for the participants' wellbeing. The conversations in the submarine in which Fred Astaire, Gregory Peck and Anthony Perkins are travelling to investigate the provenance of a mysterious Morse Code message from California's West Coast are similarly reflective.

Although he understandably gives in to temptation on occasion (the final onscreen message being particularly overwrought), Kramer doesn't overdo the anti-nuclear soapboxing, preferring to let wordless scenes

of a radiation-suited sailor exploring a wholly deserted San Diego make his point for him. (The punchline to his mission is both witty and marrow-chilling.) The recurring use of 'Waltzing Matilda' is similarly potent (especially when the lyrics are interpreted metaphorically): when spontaneously sung by a makeshift choir on the riverbank, it has all the forceful defiance of Humphrey Jennings's use of 'Land of Our Fathers' as its singers are led to their execution in *The Silent Village*, and for much the same reason.

**Disc:** This release was sourced from the same high-quality MGM master that fuelled Kino Lorber's US edition, but a sound-sync problem in one scene has been fixed. An impressive extras package includes a critical commentary adapted from the work of Australian film historian Philip Davey, a 2005 interview with Donna Anderson and fascinating on-set footage from the 1959 Melbourne shoot, idiosyncratically intertitled and narrated by local amateur filmmaker R. Goslin.

## THE RAGING MOON

Bryan Forbes; UK 1971; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 111 minutes; 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: interviews with Malcolm McDowell and Nanette Newman, stills gallery, trailer

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Given the green light by screenwriter-director Bryan Forbes himself when appointed head of production at EMI, *The Raging Moon* proved a commercial disappointment and has consequently been the most neglected of Malcolm McDowell's early features. Certainly it doesn't come close to matching the coruscating cinematic crackle of *If...* (1968), *Figures in a Landscape* (1970) or *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), but Forbes's aims were quite different: it's unashamedly a traditionally 'well-made film', but it's also heartfelt, genuinely moving and stretches McDowell emotionally in ways encountered all too rarely in the rest of his busy but wayward career. (In an interview on this disc, he claims this was his only truly naturalistic performance, and it is indeed hard to think of a similar one.)

Initially a boisterous footballer and life-and-soul wedding guest, Bruce (McDowell) quickly succumbs to a degenerative illness that leaves him paralysed from the waist down and confined to a church-run care home where amateur dramatics and artificial flower displays are the order of the day. Here and elsewhere, Forbes eschews easy heartstring-tugging in favour of blunt matter-of-factness, helped by a source novelist (Peter Marshall) and a supporting actor (Michael Flanders) who were themselves disabled, and a lead actor who was never the slightest bit disposed towards sentimentality – in fact, Gary Oldman later claimed that McDowell's performance here was what originally persuaded him to take up acting.

Forced to come to terms with being defined by his physical condition ("What are you, then? Are you polio?"), Bruce, like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s Arthur Seaton before him, refuses to let the bastards grind him down. For a film with a child-friendly BBFC classification, it's at times startlingly frank, not just about Bruce's many sexual frustrations but also the physical challenges of coping with



# New releases

➔ a deeply unwanted lifestyle change – McDowell is constantly raging against his body as well as the usual establishment figures. His romance with Jill (Nanette Newman) is similarly and refreshingly confrontational, and therefore convincing, particularly when they attempt something as basic as a first proper kiss after positioning and adjusting their wheelchairs to make sure they don't get in the way.

**Disc:** Only the DVD was supplied for review, although the abundant merits of the BFI's new restoration from the original negative are clear even at lower than optimum resolution. McDowell and Newman reminisce affectionately about both the film and Bryan Forbes in the extras.

## SECONDS

John Frankenheimer; USA 1966; Eureka/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 107 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: audio commentaries, video interview with Kim Newman

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

The third film in John Frankenheimer's 'Paranoia Trilogy', following *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Seven Days in May* (1963), this lesser-known reality-bending sci-fi drama, about a suburban midlife crisis and the lure of a 'rebirth', blends the American Dream with Kafkaesque nightmare.

Startlingly modern in its preoccupations – the cult of youth, body modification, corporate evil and soul-sucking materialism – it's an expressionist snapshot of emerging 60s concerns. So modern, in fact, that both David Fincher's *The Game* (1997) and the body-swap thriller *Self/less* (2015) drew extensively on it.

Adrian Martin's deep-and-wide commentary on this well-packaged release works hard to dispel Frankenheimer's lingering label as a highly able journeyman, pointing up everything from the film's *nouvelle vague*-influenced visual jaggedness to its Polanskian hallucinations and the homoerotic undertones of its curiously almost-all-male world.

Casting Rock Hudson, the 60s epitome of the rugged American male, as the remade hero was an inspired move (as Kim Newman points out here). Whether or not one subscribes to the much bruited concept of *Seconds*' double-life fiction being infused with Hudson's real-life one, his rattled portrayal of a man wretchedly not at home in his skin is remarkable.

Pricklingly original from Saul Bass's face-contortion credit sequence onwards, the film owes much of its impact to James Wong Howe's expressive deep-focus camerawork and optical



It's a wrap: *Seconds*

distortions, which bend and fracture key scenes in an impermeably unsettling fashion.

**Disc:** A first-rate restoration, the buffed-up transfer showing off every wrinkle on first-half-hero John Rudolph's sagging pre-Hudson countenance. Having both director and critic's commentaries is particularly valuable in this instance, though Newman's interview deftly covers all the key points for the impatient viewer.

## TWO BLACK CATS

### YOUR VICE IS A LOCKED ROOM AND ONLY I HAVE THE KEY/THE BLACK CAT

Sergio Martino/Lucio Fulci; Italy 1972/81; Arrow/Region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 96/92 minutes; 1.85:1/2.35:1; Features: interviews, trailers, featurettes, book

### Reviewed by James Blackford

This release presents two Italian takes on Edgar Allan Poe's classic tale of moral degeneration, insanity and sadism: Sergio Martino's extravagantly titled *giallo*, *Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (1972), and Lucio Fulci's gothic adaptation *The Black Cat* (1981).

In *Your Vice*, the grimly countenanced Luigi Pistilli stars as Oliviero, an alcoholic, wife-beating university professor who comes under suspicion when a student with whom he is having an affair is murdered. Bodies pile up around the family villa when Oliviero's attractive niece (Edwige Fenech) visits and enters into an affair with his tormented wife (Anita Strindberg). Finally, as per Poe, the killer is revealed to the police by the inopportune meowing of Oliviero's black cat, which has been walled up in the cellar, along with several corpses.

Martino's sensationalist thriller is an engaging melange of influences, inserting elements of Poe (a gothic villa, the prowling cat) into a *giallo* narrative offering intrigue, decadence and plentiful bloodshed and sex. Interestingly, *Vice* differs from the sleek, Argento-styled metropolitan *gialli* of the era with unexpected allusions to the French thriller tradition. The film's power plays, scheming and lesbian intrigue owe an obvious debt to Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955), while the rural setting and prominently featured Peugeot (cars are an important signifier in *gialli*) cite classic Chabrol. Although it gets under people's feet for much of the film, the black cat only becomes central in the denouement, making this a uniquely Poe-enhanced sleazy *giallo* rather than the usual gothic horror adaptation.

Fulci, meanwhile, locates his adaptation in a sleepy English village rocked by a series of mysterious deaths. David Warbeck plays a police inspector who enlists the help of a holidaying American photographer (Mimsy Farmer) in an investigation that uncovers the maniacal scheme of a medium (intensely played by Patrick Magee) able to transmit his impulses on to a black cat, which commits murder in his place.

As with his better-known zombie films, Fulci's take on Poe stresses pure atmosphere and surrealism over narrative cohesion. Although the script is the usual illogical mess and the acting often risible, *The Black Cat* benefits from audacious set pieces (there is a wholly convincing conflagration that sees Dagmar Lassander's character immolated in disturbing detail) and the Roman director's trademark excessive *mise en scène*

(plumes of fog, obsessive close-ups on nervous eyes, gloriously deliberate tracking shots through dilapidated spaces). Fulci's atmospheric, stylised images team beautifully with Pino Donaggio's romantic score, most notably during scenes of the cat stalking its victims through darkened cobbled village streets, which make audacious use of lowdown POV shots from the cat's perspective.

**Disc:** Impeccably detailed 2K restorations. Tons of extras, including interviews and a perfect-bound book with newly commissioned essays.

## WIND ACROSS THE EVERGLADES

Nicholas Ray; USA 1958; Warner Archive/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 93 minutes; 16:9

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Ray completists will kvell: this mid-career oddity, so recklessly hobbled in production and never before released on video of any kind (save for a Castilian DVD of dubious provenance), sees St Nick going to yet another extreme, making what might be Hollywood's first conservationist epic on location in the Florida Everglades.

A 29-year-old Christopher Plummer, in his second feature and first starring role, plays a fresh-faced federal game warden sent down into the frontier of the mega-swamp at the turn of the century, to confront the local crackers who are slaughtering the lawless area's avian wildlife (feeding the fad of tropical bird plumes in women's hats). The head swamp rat is Burl Ives in full blustery baritone (with an outlaw cohort that includes Peter Falk in his first role), and the story plays out as cat-and-mouse espionage and power games, until the two antagonists end up stranded in the wilderness together and the cottonmouths strike.

Written by Budd Schulberg and produced by his brother Stuart, the film is notorious for the misery had by all during its making; Ray was reportedly incoherent for much of shooting (he may've been doing heroin) and was kicked off the set by the self-righteous Schulbergs weeks before shooting was through. (Schulberg says he directed the remainder, but Ives said everybody chipped in, including the cameraman and the actors.)

It's a rough-hewn movie, full of half-hearted moments, but it also has a robust mano-a-mano tension and a savvy sense of landscape. (If anything, the simplicity and naivety of the script's environmental message, which was all Schulberg, deflates what could have been a full-on, primeval 'Southern', had Ray been as supported and capable as he had been just a few years earlier.)

Strands of Ray's stereotype-busting sensitivity surface (particularly with Plummer's character, who is no nerveless greenhorn), as does the man's insistence on moral ambiguity amid the hamminess and the profusion of stunt casting, most of it thanks to Schulberg hiring cronies: clown Emmett Kelly, stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, boxer Tony Galento, Pulitzer-winning writer MacKinlay Kantor. (The story's love interest, Chana Eden, was an Israeli stewardess Schulberg had met.) In toto, a fascinating lost voyage from the bowels of Auteurland, if not the last of Ray's ill-kept filmography to go properly public on home video.

**Disc:** Print-on-demand, from a well-kept archive print. No extras. Ⓢ

# Lost and found

## ALICE OR THE LAST ESCAPADE

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

A fantastical reimagining of Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* is perhaps the most intriguing outlier of Claude Chabrol's entire career

By Craig Williams

The ten-year period from 1968 to 1978 is considered by many to be Claude Chabrol's golden era. With masterpieces such as *La Femme infidèle* (1969) and *Le Boucher* (1970), Chabrol uncovered the violence lurking beneath the manicured surface of the French bourgeoisie with rigorous exactitude. The pursuit of the consummate Chabrolian thriller, along with variations on the theme, defined the period. But to focus exclusively on these works is to miss the bigger picture. The decade also featured some key outliers – from English-language murder mystery *Ten Days' Wonder* (1971) to the Jean-Paul Belmondo comedy *Docteur Popaul* (1972) – which are integral to appreciating the director's reach.

The chief outlier of the period and, indeed, of Chabrol's career, is 1977's *Alice ou la dernière fugue* (*Alice or the Last Escapade*). A loose interpretation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it stars Sylvia Kristel as a woman stranded in a mysterious country mansion after leaving her husband. In a career spent channelling the great crime authors of the 20th century, it is fascinating to consider that Chabrol took an unlikely detour into the fantastical to make his own equivalent of a Jean Cocteau film. But, despite the unexpected predilection for the fanciful, *Alice* is still dictated by Chabrolian concerns, acting as a distorting mirror to the common themes of his career. It is a significant work and a curious lens through which to view the rest of his oeuvre.

The prologue is a typical vision of Chabrolian domesticity – Alice leaves her pompous husband following a tiresome monologue about his work. The picture's central duality – waking life and the dream state – is achieved by positing this familiar Chabrol milieu as the reality, and the subsequent impressionistic odyssey as the dream, amplifying and fracturing the director's traits to conjure a rich sense of the uncanny. This technique recalls Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950), in which the titular hero's real world – a Paris populated by poets – is recognisably the director's own, while the Underworld into which Orphée descends to retrieve Eurydice represents an illusory flipside to reality, a dreamlike world that acts as an extension of Cocteau's artistic id.

The descent into the dream state occurs as Alice takes flight from her husband. Mirroring a similar scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), when Marion Crane arrives at the Bates Motel after absconding from her old life, images of Alice's break-up are projected on to the windscreen of her car before it shatters, leaving her stranded at a mansion in the middle of nowhere. It is



Curiouser and curiouser: Thomas Chabrol and Sylvia Kristel in *Alice or the Last Escapade*

*Darker than its literary counterpart, it careens from Langian fairytale aesthetics to metaphysical Freudian motifs*

significant that Chabrol uses *Psycho* – a reference point throughout his career – as the conduit to the picture's fantastical world, making cinema the device that connects waking life with the dream state. It is a uniquely Chabrolian rendering of Lewis Carroll's rabbit hole.

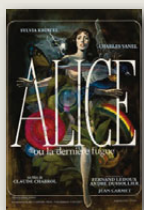
After being welcomed by an elderly man (Charles Vanel), Alice spends the night at the house and, as strange events begin to occur, finds herself unable to leave. The mysterious occurrences recall the House of Fiction in Jacques Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1974), a

film similarly indebted to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, as well as the opaque repeating patterns of Alain Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961). The house is Chabrol's *Wonderland* and, while Carrollian images are prevalent throughout – from broken clocks to chessboard flooring – it is a darker, more foreboding world than its literary counterpart, careening from Langian fairytale aesthetics to metaphysical Freudian motifs.

The threats confronting Alice in the house serve as abstractions of those that appear throughout the director's films. The notion of an unspecified evil lurking in a country mansion, for example, is a quintessential Chabrolian trait. In each instance, the evil represents an antagonistic force, either directed against bourgeois privilege, like Sandrine Bonnaire's chilling executioner in *La Cérémonie* (1995), or in service of it, as in the case of Philippe Noiret's menacing patriarch in *Masques* (1987). In leaving her husband, Alice may have physically escaped her own bourgeois prison, but the house represents the psychological frontier to be breached. Like Carroll's Alice, she must navigate the turbulence of the illogical to seize her fate.

The distorted parallels with the director's thrillers extend to the role of Alice herself. Kristel – known for her sexually transgressive roles in *Emmanuelle* (1974) and Walerian Borowczyk's *The Margin* (1976) – represents the Dionysian incarnation of the Apollonian Chabrolian *femme* (a sly take on the Carroll Alice's "curious appetites"); in replacing the typical Chabrol heroine with Kristel, *Alice* acts as a rare and revealing expression of Chabrol's creative id. Though the director would return to the Langian milieu with *Docteur M* and to psychosexual exploration with *Jours tranquilles à Clichy* (both 1990), the lesser-seen *Alice* was the last and most personal of his outliers, and the only time he truly went through the looking glass. 🍷

### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

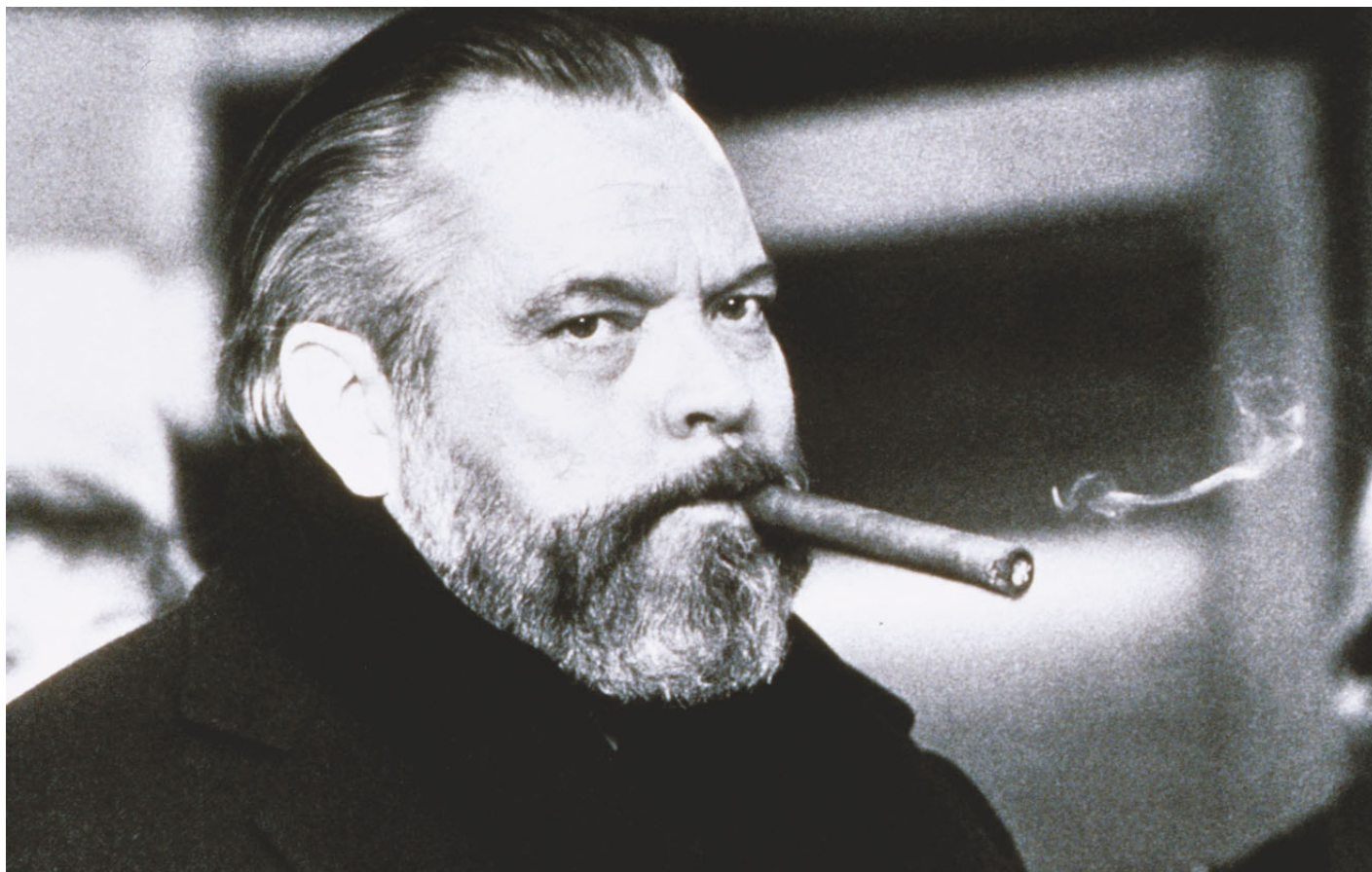


**'It looks dispiritingly lazy. Chabrol was basically elaborating and riffing on *Carnival of Souls*, which was all very well but you kind of hoped he might have conjured up something fresher. [But]**

**the atmosphere of off kilter machinations was fairly pleasingly achieved. The film was dedicated to the memory of Fritz Lang, and there is some delight in noticing the references to his work. Interesting for a director operating outside of his comfort zone, but it could have been more inspired'**

**Graeme Clark** [thespinningimage.co.uk](http://thespinningimage.co.uk), 2014





Fruitful chaos: the third part of Simon Callow's ongoing biography explores the pivotal period in Orson Welles's creative life from 1947-65

## MAGNIFICENTLY OUT OF PROPORTION

### ORSON WELLES: ONE MAN BAND

By Simon Callow. Jonathan Cape, 466pp, £25, ISBN 9780224079358

#### Reviewed by Ben Walters

The great sad irony of Orson Welles's later life is that, although he remained consistently inventive and industrious, each decade's haul of successfully realised projects was smaller than the last. "Welles did it his way," as Simon Callow observes in *Orson Welles: One Man Band*, the third volume in his ongoing biography, and that refusal to compromise arguably saved Welles as an artist while damning his career. There's no falling off of fascinating subject matter, however, when it comes to an existence one collaborator nicely described as "magnificently out of proportion". The life, Callow notes, is greater than the work – and the work is greater than the films.

*One Man Band* comes after *The Road to Xanadu* – which covered Welles's prodigious early work in theatre and radio, and culminated in the production of *Citizen Kane* (1941) – and *Hello*

*Americans*, which looked at the handful of subsequent years during which Welles blotted his Hollywood copybook and dabbled seriously in politics. Callow demonstrated in these volumes a deeply sympathetic yet critical appreciation of his fathomless subject, underpinned by exhaustive research and a heroic dedication to distinguishing fact from myth (the latter generally generated by Welles himself). *One Man Band* shows the same virtues as it examines the pivotal period from 1947-65, a time of promiscuous energy and fruitful chaos during which Welles, then in his 30s and 40s and largely based in Europe, created wonders and misfires, explored new avenues and burned old bridges, and set the course for his final decades.

This was the period during which Welles laboriously created an entirely independent film of *Othello* (1952) – a truly outlandish accomplishment – and made *Mr. Arkadin* (aka *Confidential Report*, 1955), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *The Trial* (1962) and *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), as well as delivering his finest role for another director in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) and plenty of less distinguished performances for hire too. He also

directed *Othello* and *Chimes at Midnight* on stage, as well as *King Lear*, an innovative take on *Moby Dick* (a high point of his career), the English premiere of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* starring Laurence Olivier (a calamity), an experimental ballet in Paris and a bravura cabaret in Las Vegas. It was also the period during which he fell in love with television, a part of his creative life often given short shrift but treated with thoughtful respect by Callow, who appreciates the grace with which Welles took to this most intimate and conversational medium – his astonishing telegenicity, his genius for being interviewed – though even Callow skirts over certain aspects here with unseemly haste.

If the forms were varied, Welles's methods were consistent – often maddeningly so for his collaborators. He simply loved experimenting, with new forms of technology (such as portable cameras) and with the stories he was telling. In stark contrast to Hitchcock, say, for whom the planning was all and the execution a formality, Welles's productions were created in the making. Plays were reworked up to and often beyond opening night, while films found their shape on set and in the edit. Chancing one night upon an ideal location for a scene in *Touch of Evil*, he

demanding Joseph Calleia, who was playing the police sergeant, be dragged from his bed to film it immediately, roaring mischievously: "He'll be better if he's confused." Provocation of others was a trusty tool and Welles was a maestro of "Do as I say not as I do". He was, Callow shows, consistently neglectful of his own performances, generally to the detriment of the overall production and partly because of his surprising lifelong insecurity around his abilities as an actor. He was unaccountable, disastrous at keeping tabs on time and money, sometimes a bully. And he was brilliant, gregarious and beloved by most who worked under him.

This sense of a *sui generis* genius, infuriating yet inspirational, is perhaps crucial to our ongoing fascination with Welles, which seems only to be growing as his centenary year draws to a close. Callow is surely right to identify something uncannily childlike in Welles's boundless imagination, petulant egocentricity and naive ambition, and is also shrewdly attentive to the resentful tone, perhaps not unconnected to this, that marks much contemporary coverage of his career. His productions provoked articles that were "not so much reviews as enquiries into the Welles problem"; in particular, "Welles had

*Callow is surely right to identify something childlike in Welles's boundless imagination, petulant egocentricity and naive ambition*

committed an unforgivable crime in American eyes: he had failed, but refused to give up. He was just irritatingly *there*." And yet Welles kept attracting powerful patrons and, even as his stock fell in the US, Europe began to idolise him.

Another strange thing: this adult child was in many ways deeply nostalgic, especially for lost Edens and the figures who grieve for or chase them, such as King Lear, Don Quixote and, most of all, Sir John Falstaff. The book ends with a beautiful section on the making of *Chimes at Midnight*, arguably Welles's finest picture – his elegy for Merrie England, more than three decades in the making, in which his Falstaff is the designated mourner for a lost age of expanded humanity. It's an apt conclusion for a volume that rings with sad endings: *One Man Band* shows us Welles's last theatre work as both actor and director, his last Hollywood movie as a director, his last feature produced with comprehensive outside backing. In many respects, his one-man-band status would only deepen during his two remaining decades.

The book also gives us glimpses of Pauline Kael and Oja Kodar, who will undoubtedly feature prominently in the final volume of Callow's biography, as critical nemesis and creative collaborator respectively: the first brought Welles's creative agency into question, the second gave it a new lease of life. Opinions about Welles continued to differ, then, but all agreed that, one way or another, those proportions remained magnificently out of whack. ☺

## DOCTOR ZHIVAGO

By Ian Christie, BFI Film Classics, BFI Palgrave, 100pp, £12.99, ISBN 9871844579211

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Published to coincide with the film's half-century, Ian Christie's monograph on David Lean's epic Russian Revolution romance begins with a disarming *mea culpa*, in which this venerable champion of the work of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger acknowledges that this might have led him to have been unfairly dismissive of Lean in general and late Lean in particular. Although Christie goes on to emphasise that his view was by no means a minority one (Raymond Durnat's barb about how Lean "changed from the white hope of the English cinema to its white elephant" is duly quoted), he does belatedly concede that when he rediscovered the film in the wake of his extensive research into the career of production designer John Box, "I was seeing it through very different eyes".

The book is divided into three sections, roughly covering 'before', 'during' and 'after'. Boris Pasternak's source novel looms large in the first third, as do the challenges of its adaptation, with its 50-year chronological span and the narrative problem that the two central characters never meet again after their passionate two months together. Screenwriter Robert Bolt conceived the Alec Guinness-narrated flashbacks as a means of resolving these structural difficulties, although not without numerous outbursts along the way ("That bugger Pasternak! It's like trying to straighten cobwebs."). Producer Carlo Ponti is praised for two reasons: for not insisting that his wife Sophia Loren play Lara, and for granting Lean the kind of creative control he had lacked under Sam Spiegel, his producer on *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962).

A close analysis of the film itself permits the highlighting of the contribution of all key credited participants. Christie also cites the work of original director of photography Nicolas Roeg (some of whose fingerprints remain on the film) and especially military adviser Andrew Mollo, who was faced with the considerable challenge of researching a historical period rarely depicted on screen, and who was determined not to have the partisans "looking like extras from *Taras Bulba*". Bafflingly, Mollo was denied a screen credit, while veteran Lean collaborator Eddie Fowlie merely had one for 'special effects' which, as Christie illustrates, gives a very limited idea of what he actually did on set (one of many examples: Fowlie adding two tiny pieces of glitter on to balalaika strings so that they'd catch the light).

A few touches betray its author's various academic interests: there's a nifty aside about a tribute to an early cinema 'phantom ride' that opens the film's second half, and Christie discusses explicit tributes to the silent cinema that initially nurtured DP Freddie Young, such as his revival of vignetting (in which the image

fades out at the edges). Christie's extensive knowledge of Russian culture is also brought into play, although Soviet cinema itself is barely mentioned beside passing references to Eisenstein. Other colourful touches include Robert Bolt being unable to see the film until the British premiere because his anti-nuclear activism had made him *persona non grata* in the US, and the coincidence that one of the other big 1966 British hits, albeit on television, was Ken Loach's *Cathy Come Home*, which could hardly be more different from *Zhivago*, but which more decisively signalled where British cinema was heading.

Christie's study of the film's reception usefully debunks a few myths, and draws wry comparisons between American critics' attitudes towards the film with Soviet critics' similar, if more ideologically driven, objections to the novel. He also considers the question of whether the global fame of 'Lara's Theme' and its various vocal versions had deleterious side-effects on the film's own reputation (Box and the film's eventual star Omar Sharif both believed so). Christie also drags the film's reception into the 21st century, with a look at its online coverage, from the familiar (IMDb ratings and reviews) to the decidedly less so (links between *Zhivago* and various *Star Wars* films; blogs about *Zhivago*'s influence on fashion). At fewer than 100 pages, Christie's book can't be accused of apeing the gigantism of Lean or Pasternak, but in all other respects it's admirably sympathetic. ☺

*Bolt conceived the flashbacks to resolve the novel's structural difficulties. 'It's like trying to straighten cobwebs,' he said*



Julie Christie and Omar Sharif in *Doctor Zhivago*



## THE FIRST KING OF HOLLYWOOD

### The Life of Douglas Fairbanks

By Tracey Goessel, Chicago Review Press, 581pp, \$34.95, ISBN 9781613734049

#### Reviewed by Dan Callahan

The silent-movie star Douglas Fairbanks basically did three things on screen: he ran, he jumped and he smiled. But he did all three with such grace and charisma that his films of the 1910s are still fresh and exciting, as larkish as the actor himself, and his epic costume adventures of the 1920s still retain their boyish thrills. Fairbanks was a kind of eternal boy, and this provided him with a winning formula for 15 years until talking pictures and ill health caught up with him.

There have been other biographies of Fairbanks, but none has had the breadth and intimacy of this book, a labour of love that took its author ten years of research. Tracey Goessel's key find here are the love letters that Fairbanks's wife Mary Pickford kept until her death (Goessel purchased them at an auction). These show the desperate ardour Fairbanks felt for Pickford right up until the end of his life in 1939, and also reveal that Pickford herself could be guarded and businesslike with him, even though her own feelings also ran deep.

Goessel prints a love letter to Pickford from an unknown suitor in 1917 when she was in the throes of her secret love affair with Fairbanks – they were both married to others at the time – and it reveals just how messy their personal lives were. Given Fairbanks's

enormous jealousy issues during their marriage, it seems odd indeed that Pickford kept this letter, and its inclusion here adds texture and balance to the history of their relationship.


Goessel wears her research lightly and tells the story of Fairbanks's life at a brisk pace, clarifying the tall tales of people like director Allan Dwan in a very firm manner. She obviously loves her subject, but sees him clearly and deals with his flaws in a sharp and tough-minded way. The book begins with Fairbanks as a three-year old climbing up the roof of a house and falling seven feet. In later years, Fairbanks remembered how much he liked being the centre of attention after this fall, and so remained the centre of attention in a like manner for the rest of his life. He was a prankster and a whirligig of activity, working on stage as a young man and then becoming a Broadway star before going out to Hollywood, where he found fame in a series of tart comedies written by Anita Loos.

Fairbanks was a joiner and a leader who revelled in his status and success. He did most of his own stunts in his movies, and although Dwan said they never wanted them to look like a strain, occasional quotes throughout Goessel's book suggest that all that smiling, jumping and derring-do did ultimately prove rather draining for him, even if he never let it show. After his mother died, he fell deeply in love with Pickford, and when they extricated themselves from their other marriages they reigned as the king and queen of Hollywood throughout the 1920s. Goessel details all of the fun of that and the outlandish fantasies fulfilled, and then describes the decline that set in after the pair made a talkie together, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1929).



Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks

*The author obviously loves her subject, but sees him clearly and deals with his flaws in a sharp and tough-minded way*

Fairbanks had retained his boyish demeanour into his 40s, but by the time he hit 50 he was tired – and even then he couldn't stay still. He destroyed his marriage to Pickford by travelling constantly and they separated in 1933, though Goessel reveals that they were still having physical relations as late as 1934. It is clear that Pickford didn't want to divorce Fairbanks, but this was granted in 1936. They wanted to reconcile after that, but Fairbanks blundered into marrying again and finally died of a heart attack. Following this tragic process through the letters gives new insight into these two beloved stars, in a revelatory biography of a man who had it all and lost it all soon after. 

## ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

### Experimental Film in Los Angeles, 1945-1980

Edited by David E. James and Adam Hyman, John Libbey Publishing, 335pp, £25, ISBN 9780861967155

#### Reviewed by David Curtis

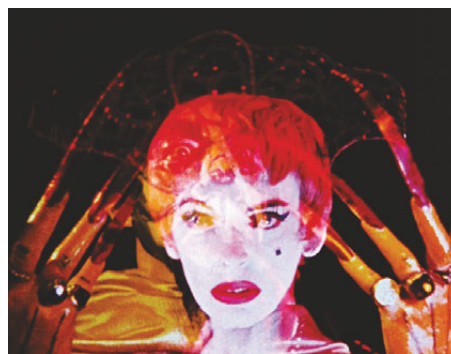
Inclusion in the Getty Foundation's recent cross-media celebration of Los Angeles creativity 'Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980' has allowed David James – author of the brilliantly eclectic *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (2006) – to encourage others to expand his field of research. This volume comprises archival texts and essays based on papers delivered at a symposium at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts, illuminated by a year-long programme of screenings at Filmforum in Los Angeles (where co-author Adam Hyman is director).

The collection is inevitably uneven. The first part, 'Historical Materials', unsurprisingly reveals Curtis Harrington, Maya Deren and Chick Strand as reflective writer-makers – but also shows Harrington was the unlikely organiser of a distribution co-op circa 1948; sadly, there is nothing here by Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos or Kenneth Anger. There's a lively text on film programming by activist John Fles (a topic more fully covered by Alison Kozberg in part two, 'Scholarship'), an odd memoir by psychedelic


filmmaker Peter Mays and an early review by Gene Youngblood of student work, including juvenilia by George Lucas and John Milius. This last piece is a reminder of overlaps between the avant garde and the mainstream in LA, a topic that is the focus of Julie Turnock's cluttered essay in part two on artists working in the special-effects industry.

More substance comes in this second part, in which the outstanding essays are Alice Hutchison's take on the fascinating mystical artist Cameron, friend of many Beats and a central figure in both Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954) and Harrington's *The Wormwood Star* (1956); Marc Siegel's 'Taylor Mead, a Faggot

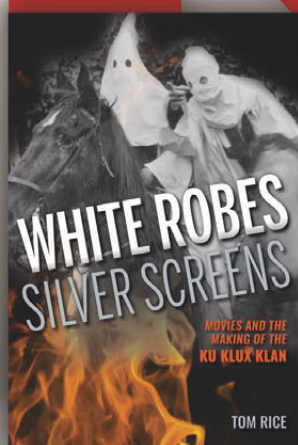
*One of the outstanding essays here is Alice Hutchison's take on the fascinating mystical artist Cameron, friend of many Beats*



Cameron in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*

in Venice Beach in 1961', which fills out Mead's pre-Warhol filmography and adds to the queer cinema canon; Grahame Weinbre's insightful analysis of the late work by Pat O'Neill (made well outside the period being studied, but O'Neill is certainly the most substantial LA artist discussed); and Juan Carlos Kase's study of Weinbre's own long neglected early work, made collaboratively with Roberta Friedman. Josh Guilford makes the case for Vernon Zimmerman's *To L.A... with Lust* (1962) and his "unclean aesthetic", reiterating familiar complaints about the failure of East Coast critics to recognise the authentic West Coast voice. There's a fascinating account of Raymond Rohauer's exploits as an organiser of screenings and occasional sponsor of artists. Here we do get to hear Brakhage's voice in a long letter to his semi-friend, the commissioner of his *Flesh of Morning* (1956). Equally unexpected is Matt Reynold's brave attempt to claim Ed Ruscha's classic *leporellos* (books with an accordion-style binding) *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) and *Then & Now: Hollywood Boulevard 1973-2004* (2005) as "paracinematic texts", pointing out that "motion is both theme and subject matter of virtually all his work". Nice try! (He does briefly discuss Ruscha's two actual films as well). The sharpest, wittiest writing comes from Erika Suderburg on the lesbian video *Nun and Deviant* (1976). There is a useful summary of the work of the Chicano group Asco and elsewhere of a key work by Barbara McCullough inspired in part by Deren and Julie Dash. The concluding list of 28 film programmes with brief notes gives a more comprehensive picture of the field, and is a valuable research tool in itself. 

# Read



## WHITE ROBES, SILVER SCREENS

**Movies and the Making of the Ku Klux Klan**

By Tom Rice, Indiana University Press, 328pp, paperback, illustrated, £18.99, ISBN 9780253018434  
 "Quickly moving us beyond everything we knew about D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, Tom Rice's *White Robes, Silver Screens* is a brilliant exposé that unveils the complex, rich and disturbing history of the modern Klan, its extensive appropriations of motion pictures for political purposes, its attacks on Hollywood, and Hollywood's own multi-faceted responses to this powerful force of reaction. A fresh and compelling perspective on American cinema from the release of Griffith's blockbuster to the Second World War."  
 — Charles Musser, Yale University  
[www.iupress.indiana.edu](http://www.iupress.indiana.edu)



## IRANIAN CINEMA UNCENSORED

**Contemporary Filmmakers Since the Islamic Revolution**

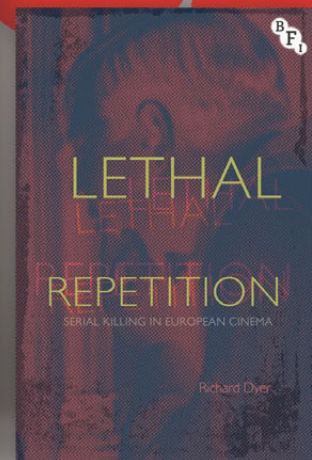
By Shiva Rahbaran, translated by Maryam Mohajer & Shiva Rahbaran, I.B. Tauris, 336pp paperback, £17.99, ISBN 9781784534189  
 Twelve of the most important filmmakers in contemporary Iran speak candidly about creating cinema in a post-revolutionary – and traumatised – society. They reflect on the Iranian Revolution and the influence of its aftermath on their art, as well as the effects of their work on audiences worldwide. They offer insights into how the films of Western and global cineastes, as well as Iran's long tradition of art and poetry, has influenced the creation of Iran's image; and how the seeds of the New Iranian Cinema were sown decades before the Revolution and then evolved into a global phenomenon, despite censorship, ideological wars, sanctions and political isolation.  
[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)



## LOVE

**A BFI Compendium**

Edited by James Bell, BFI, 160pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99, ISBN 9781844579365  
 Since the birth of cinema, stories of love and romance have been its beating heart. From romantic epics to screwball comedy, Bollywood musicals to dark tales of obsession and desire, explore cinema's love affair with love in the fifth edition of the BFI's unique series of Compendium publications. With contributions from leading film critics and writers, including Molly Haskell, David Thomson, Mark Cousins, Hannah McGill, Pamela Hutchinson, J. Hoberman, Neil Brand, Dan Callahan, Guy Lodge, Imogen Sara Smith, Tim Robey, Geoff Andrew, Rachel Dwyer, Ashley Clark and many more.  
[tinyurl.com/pr8xssl](http://tinyurl.com/pr8xssl)



## LETHAL REPETITION

**Serial Killing in European Cinema**

By Richard Dyer, BFI/Palgrave, 256pp, paperback, £18.99, ISBN 9781844573936  
 Shifting the focus away from the US, which is often seen as the home of the serial killer, *Lethal Repetition* instead examines serial killing in European culture and cinema – ranging from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and from Britain to Romania. Spanning all types of cinema – including avant-garde, art, mainstream and trash – Dyer explores what this marginal and uncommon crime is being made to mean on European screens.  
[www.palgrave.com/page/bfi-publishing](http://www.palgrave.com/page/bfi-publishing)





The *Journal of Film Preservation* is published twice a year by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF). It offers a forum for both general and specialized discussions on all theoretical, technical and historical aspects of moving image archival activities. Articles are written in English, French or Spanish, with summaries in the other two languages.

**PURCHASE THE CURRENT ISSUE,  
DOWNLOAD BACK ISSUES  
OR SUBSCRIBE TO THE JFP**

1-year subscription (2 issues): 40€ + shipping costs  
2-year subscription (4 issues): 70€ + shipping costs

[www.fiafnet.org](http://www.fiafnet.org)

**fiaf**

Dedicated to the preservation of, and access to,  
the world's film heritage since 1938



# FILM IS FRAGILE

**Help protect our nation's film collection**

**DONATE NOW**

Your support will help preserve film forever

[bfi.org.uk/filmisfragile](http://bfi.org.uk/filmisfragile)



Postgraduate opportunity

# Study Film at Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh offers postgraduate study in film from theoretical, philosophical and national perspectives while also offering a distinctive Masters programme in exhibiting and curating film.

The **MSc in Film Studies** allows you to explore crucial concepts in the development of film theory and film-philosophy with an emphasis on European and American auteur cinema. We put serious film criticism, analysis and interpretation at the centre of our degree as well as focusing on film aesthetics, national cinemas and film adaptations. Taught by Dr David Sorfa and Dr Daniel Yacavone.

The **MSc in Film, Exhibition and Curation** is an innovative programme which combines rigorous critical study of cinema with applied project work on film programming, film festivals and curation. With contributors including leading curators, filmmakers and writers this programme will give you the knowledge and professional skills you need for a career in film exhibition, curation, education or research. Taught by Susan Kemp and Jane Sillars.

Full and partial scholarships for Masters tuition fees are available.

The University of Edinburgh is part of the AHRC Doctoral consortium and we welcome proposals for the three year **PhD in Film Studies**. Deadline 5 January 2016.

[www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/film](http://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/film)



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
School of Literatures,  
Languages and Cultures

The University of Edinburgh is a charitable body, registered in Scotland, with registration number SC005336.

## SCHOOL OF FILM & TELEVISION

RECRUITING NOW FOR:

BA ANIMATION & VISUAL EFFECTS

BA FILM

BA TELEVISION

MA FILM & TELEVISION

Full and partial scholarships for Masters tuition fees are available for 2016/17 entry. For more information contact [admissions@falmouth.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@falmouth.ac.uk)

 [falmouth.ac.uk/SoFT](http://falmouth.ac.uk/SoFT)

 @SoFTFalmouth

**FALMOUTH**  
UNIVERSITY

SOME OF OUR GUEST  
LECTURERS HAVE INCLUDED:  
FRAZER CHURCHILL | KIERAN EVANS  
GUY HEELEY | JOHNNY FEWINGS  
MARC SILVER | MICK PILSWORTH  
LENNY ABRAHAMSON | WILL OSWALD  
NISH PANCHAL | JACK THORNE  
FESTIVAL FORMULA | ALEX ROSS PERRY  
RYAN GILBEY | JOHANNES ROBERTS  
JAMES DEAN | ANDREW SENSENIG  
MIKE HODGES | JEANIE FINLAY  
TESS MORRIS | RICHARD HERRING  
PAUL DUBBRIDGE | MARY BURKE  
DON LETTS | NEIL ROLLAND  
CRASHBURN MEDIA



**BFI**  
Film  
Forever

# LOVE ON THE DOLE



**STARRING SIX TIME ACADEMY  
AWARD® NOMINATED  
ACTRESS DEBORAH KERR**

**ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL  
BY WALTER GREENWOOD**

**ON SALE 18 JANUARY  
PRE ORDER NOW**

**BFI  
SHOP**

**BFI**  
Film  
Forever

## NEW FROM BFI PUBLISHING THIS CHRISTMAS



**£16.99**

### **LOVE** A BFI COMPENDIUM

Explore cinema's love affair with love in the fifth edition of the BFI's unique and much-loved series of Compendium publications

Read more about your favourite films from the blockbuster season



**£12.99**

**ORDER NOW** [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

**BFI  
SHOP**



# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: [S&S@bfi.org.uk](mailto:S&S@bfi.org.uk)

## KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

Kudos to all concerned for the female-focused October issue of *Sight & Sound* ('The Female Gaze', plus other columns and articles). A case of 'job started', rather than 'job well done', one hopes.

**Julia Vickers** Reading

## GOING TO EXTREMES

The only British film of the 1970s to be solely directed by a woman was Jane Arden's *The Other Side of the Underneath* (1972), so it was regrettable that it failed to feature in your otherwise impressive list of '100 overlooked films directed by women' (*S&S*, October). Perhaps its omission can be explained by the fact that, even 43 years on, Arden's film – finally restored by the BFI in 2009 – remains an unbearably intense portrait of female psychosis. Indeed, those involved in the film's production also struggle to revisit it, so raw is its content. Developed out of Jane Arden's Holocaust theatre group, it united talent as disparate as actress Sheila Allen and activist Liz Danciger and the artist Penny Slinger, and illustrates to this day just how intense female responses were to the era's patriarchy and sexual politics. The film's extremity might seem alien to viewers now in the relatively liberalised West, but it's worth noting the antagonisms it depicts remain tragically that well-nourished in the patriarchies of the Middle East and Africa, and its depiction of body issues – also explored to great effect in Slinger's art of the period – remain as prescient and powerful as ever.

**Richard Kovitch** by email

*Editor's note: Jane Arden was indeed a pioneering female British director in the 1970s but wasn't included in our Female Gaze issue due to her work being recently reappraised and made available on DVD from the BFI. Interestingly, consulting the BFI's database CID, it turns out that Arden in fact wasn't the only British woman to be sole director on a feature in that decade: Christine Edzard made 'Stories from a Flying Trunk' (1979).*

## IN THE FIRING LINE

It's a shame that David Thomson did not, in his article on Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (Endings, *S&S*, November), give a passing reference to Andrew Marton's brilliant but almost forgotten black-and-white version of the same work from 1964, starring Keir Dullea and Jack Warden. My father, a World War II veteran, sat through the Malick with me and declared it pretty but tedious and not to be seen again, whereas we both left *Saving Private Ryan* with tears streaming.

**William Ameen** North Carolina, US

## PERFECT CRIME

As a fan of Patricia Highsmith's Ripley novels and their film adaptations I really enjoyed Philip Kemp's survey of the character on screen ('The poet of apprehension', *S&S*, December). Delon, Hopper, Damon, Malkovich... but what about Barry Pepper? Ripley fans might want to check out Roger Spottiswoode's little seen *Ripley Under Ground* (2005). It didn't receive a UK cinema

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### AAAAAAAH! NO!



Marsha Rankin's letter ('Virtual obsolescence', *S&S*, June) expressed her concern that, by excluding commentary of films that appear first online, *Sight & Sound* might be in danger of becoming detached. Last night, here in Australia, I watched Steve Oram's brand new *Aaaaaaaah!* via iTunes UK. I'm happy that smart UK programmers working for Edinburgh's Cameo, Leeds's Hyde Park Picture House, QFT in Belfast and Broadway Nottingham have got the film into cinemas, but *Aaaaaaaah!* has bypassed an 'official' cinema release and, by shooting straight to iTunes and Amazon, has swerved the mechanisms that qualify

a film for review in *S&S*. This highlights what is now a serious problem for *S&S*; as David Jenkins wrote in his review for *Little White Lies*, *Aaaaaaaah!* really is "one of the great British films of the new millennium". Oram's astonishing film deserves attention far and wide, and especially from you.

**Tom Vincent** Perth International Arts Festival, Australia

*Editor's note: Tom Vincent is quite right. 'Aaaaaaaah!' did regrettably circumvent our processes, but we have decided to give it an unusually long DVD review in our next issue in recompense rather than run an unhelpfully retrospective film review.*

release, but you can track it down on a good quality Dutch DVD (with subtitles you can turn off). For my money, it is criminally overlooked, capturing the trademark Highsmith relish for wrongdoing without sacrificing the lashings of apprehension. Pepper is a beguilingly beautiful Ripley too – and, of course, utterly deadly.

**David Lowbridge-Ellis** Wolverhampton

## SPECTRE AT THE FEAST

After sitting through *SPECTRE* on opening day in the UK, in a packed theatre no doubt spurred on by the film's astonishing critical reception, I had the terrible feeling we had all been sold a bit of lie by the gamut of five-star reviews and over-the-top proclamations of "best Bond ever".

During the film I could sense the fatigue of the audience around me, some bewildered, some just tired out by the run-time, and my mind began to run to the *SPECTRE*-like machine of our critical and commercial filmmaking climate. Many a transatlantic forum commenter later lamented how shockingly positive the British press were ahead of its US premiere, which led me to ponder the motivations of British film culture for holding Bond so highly. Is it a GDP issue? Is it a national identity issue (where else is a British icon free to once again walk all over the world wreaking a special, cultured and suave kind of havoc)? Or is

it simply a case of a film that has divided critics from audiences (not one person I have spoken to has thought the film anything but tedious) and critics from critics (there is a clear US v UK sentiment battle at play with each new review)?

**David Valjalo** Liverpool

## DEAD ENDS

Like Nick James I squirmed through the celebratory coda of *Bridge of Spies* ('Appointment in Berlin', *S&S*, December) and suspect few dared mention the same problem with *Schindler's List*. This seems a Hollywood issue created by the need for closure and affirmation, reaching its nadir when Oliver Stone critic-proofed *World Trade Center* by bringing a New York firefighter to chat shows. We know that *The Third Man*'s original coda (Holly Martins and Anna leaving arm in arm) would have damaged the film. Imagine *All the President's Men* with a congratulatory scene after its shot of two men typing and you see the scale of the problem.

**Christopher Fowler** London

## Additions and corrections

**December** p.73 *The Dressmaker*, Certificate 12A, 118m 8s; p.73 *The Fear of 13*, Certificate 15, 95m 16s; p.74 *Glenns*, Certificate 15, 107m 32s; p.78 *Kill Your Friends*, Certificate 18, 103m 24s; p.84 *Radiator*, Certificate 15, 93m 35s; p.89 *Tell Spring Not to Come This Year*, Certificate 15, 83m 51s; p.92 *Warriors*, Certificate 12A, 86m 57s  
**November** p.68 *Taxi Tehran*, Certificate 12A, 81m 40s



## BREATHLESS



The fatal gun shot that brings Jean-Luc Godard's 1960 film to a close acted as the starting shot for a new era in French cinema

By Adam Batty

"*Ch'uis vraiment dégueulasse*" – there's hardly a more widely debated closing exchange in all of cinema than the one that brings the curtain down on Jean-Luc Godard's feature debut. Mistranslation in the face of the nuances of French slang is to be blamed for the uncertainty around the line, spoken by Jean-Paul Belmondo's dying scoundrel Michel to Jean Seberg's Patricia, the woman in trouble who led him to his eventual fate – shot down by the police in a Paris street. "It's disgusting", "scumbag" and "makes me want to puke" are just some of the translations of "*dégueulasse*" to have been suggested. The most recent restoration of the film offers "I'm a real creep". But the question remains: is Patricia, an American in Paris, being damned by her former beau, or is Michel instead condemning the position in which he finds himself?

As unsure as we are, Patricia asks what Michel has just said. "*Qu'est ce qu'il a dit?*" she says to Vital, the policeman who has just shot Michel. "*Il a dit que vous êtes vraiment une dégueulasse*," Vital replies, before Patricia utters the film's famous final line, "*Qu'est ce que c'est 'dégueulasse'?*" and, as we have seen Michel do throughout the film, runs her thumb across her lip Humphrey Bogart-style, pondering the enigma that has puzzled audiences ever since.

Michel Poiccard's death is a melodrama

stripped of Technicolor and contrast, framed instead by DP Raoul Coutard's use of natural light. Michel was, of course, always destined to face this fate. From the opening beats of the film, in which he kills a *flic* and flees the scene, cinematic convention tells us that here is a dead man walking. Godard's film may revel in the breaking of form and convention, but some things remain inescapable. Explaining himself in an interview in 1963 in relation to *Breathless*, the director said: "What I wanted was to take a very conventional story and remake, but differently, everything the cinema had done." "Differently" didn't extend to the destiny of his hero, who suffers the same endgame as that of any number of anti-hero protagonists in French and American cinema.

At this stage of his career Godard was still happy to wear his affection for a certain kind of Hollywood film proudly. The ending of *Breathless* is something of a homage to Raoul Walsh's early Warner Bros noir *High Sierra* (1941), from which Godard lifts his last-minute miscommunication-between-lovers punchline (as well as Michel's nods to Bogart, that film's star). The circle would be completed in 2005 when Noah Baumbach paid respect to the ending of the Godard movie in his own *The Squid and the Whale* ("It means 'bitch' – don't you remember?" a convalescent Jeff Daniels says to his ex-wife, offering up yet another

*What I wanted was to take a very conventional story and remake, but differently, everything the cinema had done*

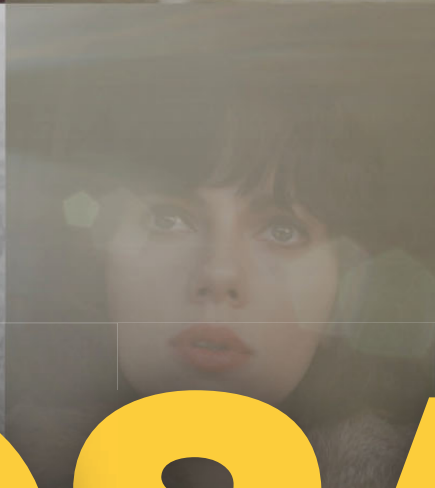
translation of the exchange in his attempts to evoke the spirit of Godard cool in the wake of his own near-death experience). The US remake *Breathless* (1983) sees the Godard film reworked by director Jim McBride, with Richard Gere in the Belmondo role. The iconography of the original picture is subverted in fascinating, surreal ways; Michel here becomes Jesse Lujack, who, instead of surrendering to the police, chooses to face them instead, with the film ultimately closing on a freeze-frame of a doomed Lujack, as a contemporary punk cover of Jerry Lee Lewis's *Breathless* is heard on the soundtrack.

Godard famously set out to shoot *Breathless* on the fly, an approach which would become one of the guerilla tactics most closely associated with the *Nouvelle Vague*. This is at its most explicit in this final scene, as random passers-by look over towards Coutard's camera and the flailing Belmondo, only a few feet ahead of him, as he makes his way down rue Campagne-Première to his death.

This breaking of the fourth wall extends to the film's final shot, in which Patricia's stare to camera is held for a few seconds longer than one might expect. The Bogie impersonation has passed from Michel to Patricia – it's cinema as viral infection. The gun shot that ends one picture acts as the starting shot for a new era. Godard himself saw his film as the final movement in a reinvigoration of French cinema; he declared: "A certain kind of cinema has just drawn to a close, maybe ended, so let's add the finishing touches, let's show that anything goes." ⑤

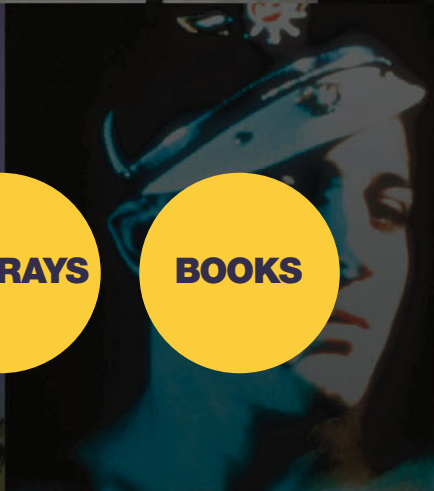
**i** *Breathless* is screening as part of the Jean-Luc Godard season at BFI Southbank, London, from 1 January – 31 March





# BFI SHOP SALE

STARTS 1 JANUARY



DVDS

BLU-RAYS

BOOKS

Visit the **BFI Shop** in-store and online to grab yourself a bargain. Choose from **DVDs** and **Blu-rays** from labels including: Arrow, BFI, Artificial Eye, Optimum and Eureka! or pick up something to read from our vast **book collection**.

**BFI SOUTHBANK**  
London SE1 8XT  
📍 Waterloo  
[shop.bfi.org.uk](http://shop.bfi.org.uk)



"HEART-STOPPINGLY BEAUTIFUL...  
A MARTIAL ARTS SAGA LIKE NO OTHER"



ROBBIE COLLIN, THE TELEGRAPH

"CAPTIVATES & ASTONISHES...  
THERE IS MAJESTY & MYSTERY IN THIS FILM"



PETER BRADSHAW, THE GUARDIAN

"RIDICULOUSLY GORGEOUS...  
AN EPIC VISUAL POEM"

JESSICA KIANG, INDIEWIRE



TIME OUT

# THE ASSASSIN

A FILM BY  
HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

OFFICIAL ENTRY - TAIWAN  
BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM  
ACADEMY AWARDS 2016

WINNER



BEST DIRECTOR  
CANNES FILM FESTIVAL



IN CINEMAS JANUARY 22

SPOTFILMS, SHI-METROPOLIS ORGANISATION LTD., CENTRAL MOTION PICTURE INTERNATIONAL CORP., HUACE PICTURES, CHINA DREAM FILM CULTURE INDUSTRY LIMITED, MEDIA ASIA FILMS PRODUCTION LIMITED  
"THE ASSASSIN" HOU HSIAO-HSIEN PRODUCED BY HOU HSIAO-HSIEN, CHEN YI-DI, T.H. TUNG, T.C. GOU, KOFU LIN, ZHAO YI-FANG, SZE JAI-ME, PETER LAM, HOU HSIAO-HSIEN, CHANG CHEN, SHU QI  
ZHAO YUN, TSUMAGAKI SATOSHI, HSIEN HSI-MENG, ETHAN JUAN, NI DAHONG, YONG MEI, LEI ZHENYU, SHEU FANG-YI, JACQUES PICOUX, HOU HSIAO-HSIEN, LIAO CHING-SONG  
ZHONG ACHENG, CHU TIEN-WEN, HSIEN HSI-MENG, MARK LEE PING-BING, YAO HUNG-T, LIAO CHING-SONG, PAULIE HUANG CHIH-CHIA, HWANG WERN-YING  
TU DUO-CHIH, WU SHU-YAO, LIM GIONG, LEE CHI-CHIN, LIU MINGZHE, LIU JIE, WILD BUNCH



© 2015 SPOTFILMS LTD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED